



## **ABSTRACT**

### **CHURCH FOR THE NEVER CHURCHED:**

### **A STUDY OF EFFECTIVE MINISTRY AREAS FOR EVANGELIZING PEOPLE WITHOUT A BACKGROUND IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

by

Thomas Glenn Jackson, III

The purpose of this research project was to discover if one ministry area for evangelism is more effective than others for never-churched persons. The literature review focuses on the theological understanding of Jonah as a model for evangelizing the never churched as well as a discussion of postmodernism and Generation X. The research method was a survey of persons from eleven different churches. The research shows that the most effective ministry area for evangelism in the population studied is narrative evangelism, which is the process of a person sharing their experience of the gospel with someone they already know.

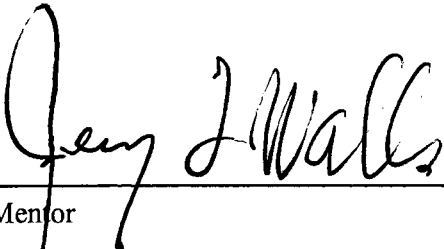
## DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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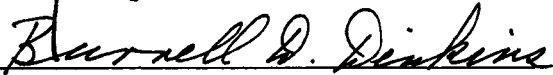
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A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of  
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## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The Church of Jesus Christ is going through a period of dramatic change in Western society. Protestant denominations that once dominated the Christian landscape are waning throughout the Western world while some denominational churches are blossoming. Unfortunately for the Church, the rate of increase in growing churches, denominational or not, does not match the rate at which people are leaving the Church. This decreasing attendance in relation to population is a tremendous change from recent history. For much of the past two hundred years, the various Protestant denominations operated in a culture that, for the most part, both affirmed and supported the mission and values of the Christian faith. The vast majority of people identified themselves as Christians, attended Christian churches, and shared what was generally a common understanding of the Christian life and the purposes of the Church. Those who did not attend a church lived and breathed in a culture that understood the basics of the Christian faith. Protestantism thrived in this ministry area. The churches knew how to operate in a culture that understood them, but unfortunately much has changed in the past few decades.

A few years ago, during the Christmas season, I was driving with a non-Christian friend. She grew up in the Bible belt in a major urban center. We passed a church with a manger scene out front. Knowing I was a pastor she asked, “Who are those three guys dressed up in the fancy clothes?” She grew up in the Bible belt, in and around churches and Christians all the time, yet she had never heard of the Three Wise Men. Unfortunately she is not alone in her detachment from the biblical story. Today, though the vast majority of North Americans identify themselves as Christians, few of them are

in worship every week. More significantly, the number of people with virtually no awareness of even the basics of the Christian faith seems to be on the rise. These are people who did not grow up in a church. They did not attend Christmas and Easter services. Their parents, though possibly claiming to be Christians themselves, never exposed them to a Christian community and transferred little, if any, of their own Christian background, thoughts, or values to their children. To them, the Christian faith is irrelevant. Unfortunately, the percentage of people fitting this description is increasing with no sign of abatement. I believe the Protestant denominations, which thrived in a Christian culture, do not, for the most part, know how to reach these individuals. If this segment of society continues to grow, the consequences for Protestantism are ominous.

The good news is many churches have a dynamic ministry to the never churchd. Never-churched people are being drawn into the Christian community and are becoming disciples. These churches are distinguished from those that simply draw large crowds but fail to lead people toward Christian life change. Followers of Christ need to understand what is happening in the churches that effectively evangelize never-churched persons. Followers of Christ need to know the similarities of churches that effectively share the gospel with never-churched communities.

My own interest in this subject began during my tenure as the associate pastor at First United Methodist Church of Orlando, Florida. First Church is a downtown church well over one hundred years old with a vibrant ministry to this day. During my tenure I noticed that the vast majority of those who joined and attended the church had a previous background in other churches. Even though some experienced real conversions, they were still people who grew up in a church, attended as a youth, or in some other way had

a background in the Christian faith. I began to wonder why we were not attracting and retaining people who did not have any previous experience in Christian the faith.

In order to pursue the answer to this statement I applied for and received a grant from the Louisville Institute to study new churches around the country that grew rapidly. The main question I asked in the study was, “Are there differences between growing churches that are less than ten years old, and those that are between twenty and thirty years old?” My sense was that growing churches which started twenty to thirty years ago are very different from more recent growing church plants. Though many similarities exist between churches that started thirty years ago and more recent start-ups, many differences exist as well. Most importantly, one characteristic was common to most of the churches—none of them reached people who had no previous involvement with a church or the Christian faith. All these great churches reached people, but they were people who knew the basics of the faith and understood at least part of the Christian story.

At the same time, more and more people were growing up without even an elementary understanding of the Christian faith. From my college friends to non-churched friends I met in Orlando, more and more people seemed to have never connected with the Christian faith at any point in their lives. Though no studies document the exact number of never-churched persons in the United States today, empirical data tells me the population is growing.

I was left with a dilemma. On the one hand, the never-churched population seemed to be growing with no signs of abatement. On the other hand, the church models to which so many churches and pastors look are not reaching this population. If the never-churched population continued to grow, and churches followed models designed for churched populations, then at some point the churches would become irrelevant;

therefore, I have come to believe there is a need to analyze additional models for evangelism in the local church. Clearly, many previously churchd persons exist in our surrounding communities whom the Church needs to reach, but other models of evangelism are needed in order to reach the never churchd.

### **The Purpose Stated**

The purpose of this study was to discover if one ministry area (service projects, narrative evangelism, one-on-one evangelism, worship, or small groups) for evangelism is especially effective in reaching never-churchd persons. It sought to compare ideas presented in the literature with some tangible data collected from never-churchd persons.

### **Research Questions**

1. Does the ministry area for effective evangelism differ between the ten never-churchd persons and ten previously churchd persons in each of the ten churches included in this study?
2. In general, which of the five ministry areas for evangelism (worship, small groups, service projects, one-on-one witnessing, or narrative evangelism) is most effective in reaching never-churchd, Protestant, urban, Generation Xers?
3. Given the dynamics of postmodernism, why is the leading ministry area so effective in the process of evangelism?

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, a number of principle terms exist that are important and are defined below.

*Never-churchd persons* are people with very little or no previous background in a Christian community of faith. These are people who were not Christmas and Easter

visitors. They probably did not grow up with Christian parents and did not grow up attending a Christian place of worship. They had virtually no background in the Christian faith before interacting with the Church or individual that helped them develop a relationship with Christ.

*Generation X* represents the population born between 1964 and 1975.

*Postmodernism* describes the philosophical, religious, and cultural ministry area that has replaced the modernist/Enlightenment movements.

*Evangelism* is the process by which the good news of Jesus Christ is communicated to others.

*Ministry area for evangelism* describes the arenas in which most evangelism takes place. From the research the dominant ministry areas seem to be worship services, small groups, service projects, one-on-one witnessing, and narrative evangelism. I chose the words “ministry area” because it best describes what I sought to study. I wanted to study the five specific arenas in which evangelism takes place, more than I wanted to look at specific techniques or methods involved in those ministry areas.

*Previously churching persons* are individuals with previous involvement in a church though the nature and extent of that involvement may be different from person to person.

*Microclimates* describe the religious and cultural subcultures unique to geographic areas. The term microclimates attempts to emphasize that even subcultures now have subcultures within themselves.

## **Methodology**

This project is a descriptive study and uses a researcher-designed instrument. It is an observer, researcher study of other ministry areas. The instrument sought to ascertain

which, if any, of the ministry areas for evangelism were most effective in reaching Protestant, urban, never-churched Generation Xers. After thorough research, a list of ministry areas for evangelism was created. Based on that list, a questionnaire was formulated that discerns which ministry area was most important for the population studied. The results give a general snapshot of the ministry area of effective evangelism for those individuals participating in the study. The results of this study helped inform me of what works in other churches, which I used to start New Hope United Methodist Church (UMC) in Orlando.

### **Population and Subjects**

The population for this study was three hundred forty-two individuals from eleven churches in urban centers around the United States. Each church was asked to gather a group of twenty individuals who were included in the study. Individuals were to be chosen who were Protestant, urban, Generation Xers, and who came to faith in Christ within the five years prior to the questionnaire administration date. Ten of the twenty individuals were to be Christians out of a never-churched background. The other ten individuals were to be previously churched. The actual population in each church differed from the above as it proved difficult to gather that specific population.

To facilitate the data-gathering process, this study narrows the population of never-churched persons to Protestant, urban, Generation X (Gen X) persons who have become Christians within the previous five years. This focus was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it helped narrow the population. Second, never-churched persons seem to be concentrated in urban areas rather than in suburban or rural communities. Cities, therefore, may give an indication of what the rest of the country will face in the near future. Unfortunately, most urban churches are failing to reach these new populations in

dramatic numbers. This study sought to discover any common ministry areas for evangelism that the few effective churches use.

### **Instrumentation**

The questionnaire focused on the important ministry areas for evangelism as discovered in the literature review. The instrument contains thirty questions, ten of which specifically address the five ministry areas on a five-point Likert scale. Demographic and ministry area questions were included in the questionnaire.

### **Data Collection**

I contacted pastors from various urban churches around the United States that reach out to the desired study population, and I asked for permission to study twenty individuals from each church. All twenty needed to be converted within the previous five years, with half never churched, and half previously churched. Where granted I set up a time to visit the church and administer the questionnaire. The church then contacted the individuals and specified the purpose and date for the gathering to take the survey. On the appointed date, the questionnaire was handed out, and individuals were asked to complete the questionnaire at that sitting. Once completed, the surveys were returned to me and I gave them to Dan Agliata to analyze the data.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

The need for this study rose out of my frustration with the lack of information about how the Church can effectively evangelize never-churched persons. Presently, much information exists about the unchurched and previously churched. Many of the high-profile churches have made their reputations on how they are effectively reaching the unchurched. When asked very specifically, most of these churches define “unchurched” as having not been in a church within the past six months or as having

grown up in a church and then leaving. No church seems to reach people with no previous background in a church in any significant way.

This study, therefore, takes a sampling of never churched, urban, Protestant Generation Xers to determine specific ministry areas for evangelism that are especially important to this population. This research adds to the information on evangelism and provides some material and emphases for all denominations and nondenominations in the process of evangelizing. I believe the ongoing process of urbanization and secularization means the results of this study are useful not only to urban churches but also to suburban and possibly even rural churches in the coming years. The instrument I developed is designed so that other population groups can be studied to find the ministry areas in which they are effectively evangelized. In addition, I hope to adapt the results of this research so they can be used in the life of my own church in Orlando.

### **Biblical and Historical Precedents**

The theological foundation for this study focuses on the book of Jonah, but the relevant issues are found throughout the Bible. The Bible is the story of God bringing the good news of his love to the people who do not know him. Genesis begins with the story of creation—a story of God desiring good order and good relationships with those he created. It is a story of perfect relationship where God and the people live and converse in community. Before long that community crumbles. The rest of the Bible, and the rest of human history, is the story of God reaching out and seeking humanity in order to restore that original community. God speaks to Abraham and tells him that from his ancestors God will develop a great nation that will be his covenant people. That covenant is strengthened in Moses who, with God, delivers the people from the Egyptians and begins to develop a cohesive people who serve and follow Yahweh. The rest of the Old



Testament details the story of that covenant people. The Old Testament is a story of great success and tremendous failure. In the story, the community between God and his people sometimes seems unbreakable. At other times, human frailty shatters the community and God works again to bring restoration. The Old Testament is a story of a God who seeks a lost people. The people return to the Lord, but eventually they leave him once again. The Old Testament is a repetitive story. God's people never seem to keep community central for long, so God gives the utmost sign and goes to the furthestmost lengths to show his enormous love. He reaches out to humanity; he seeks them out to the point of death.

The New Testament opens with four stories (Gospels) of a man named Jesus who lives, dies, and comes back to life in order to bring full restoration to the people of God. The restoration of community is not wholly realized by humanity in this life, but community is eternally complete in the resurrection of Jesus. God sought his people. God went to them and was willing for his son to die in order to share the wonderful news of his love with them.

The rest of the New Testament is the story of how the new community of God's people, the Church, is to live in this world and prepare for the next. The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is a story of glory and failure. It is a story of a people who are swayed by the world and who return to Yahweh. These people return only because the Lord continues to seek them out. The Lord goes to them through his Spirit and the Church.

God's seeking of his people does not end with the close of the New Testament. Church history is a testament itself to God's desire to take his good news to every land and people. From Augustine to St. Patrick to John Wesley to Mother Teresa, God has been, and still is, at work taking his good news to those who have never heard it. God

changes the ways he communicates his good news depending on the age and the circumstances.

Even as the above history shows the relevant nature of the topic to the story of God's work in the world, one biblical character seems of utmost importance for this study. His name is Jonah.

### **Theological Foundation**

So often the book of Jonah is portrayed as little more than a story about a man swallowed by a gigantic fish. This is indeed part of the story, but the fish is not the most important part. Jonah is a book about God's incredible love for all of humanity. It is a story about a God who is Creator and Lord of all the Earth. The story tells of a God who loves the world and longs to forgive all people. This God patiently pursues his people and works to bring about his loving desires for the world. God engages a people who for the most part have never heard of him before. Jonah is a story of people who hear God's story and repent. It is a story of obedience. The story shows how sometimes the people who know God best do not want others to know the good news. This is a story for people in the eighth century BC, and it is a story for the twenty-first century AD.

### **Background and Introduction**

Jonah is one of the twelve books commonly grouped together as the Minor Prophets. They are grouped as such not because of their short length but because they consist of prophecy against Israel and the Gentiles thought to have been written sometime between the eighth and fourth centuries BC. Jonah, however, is unique in that it does not claim to be prophecy (Achtemeier 255). Most of the other prophets make repetitive claims for themselves as prophets and the prophetic nature of their preaching. These claims are not found in Jonah. Because Jonah does not repetitively claim to being a

prophet, the book presents itself more as a story of a man than a prophecy about a nation or people. In the end, the reader comes away with the idea that this story deals with more than just the life of Jonah. This story tells who Yahweh is and what he does (255).

**Author and date.** Jonah is obviously the main character but not necessarily the author. Indeed 3:3 refers to Jonah in the past tense, which would imply that someone other than Jonah wrote the book. If one holds to the idea that Jonah is the author, then it was written in the first half of the eighth century BC. If Jonah is not the author, then the dating is most likely from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC.

Jonah himself can be dated by the one other reference to him in 2 Kings 14:25. This passage tells that Jonah was a prophet and son of Amittai from Gath Hepher during the early part of King Jeroboam II's reign. Jeroboam's reign was marked by great prosperity and expansion. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was one of the great cities, if not the greatest, of its day. Archaeology has revealed that at the height of its power Nineveh had a perimeter of about 7 1/2 miles, an enormous size for its day (Achtemeier 257). Yet Nineveh was ruthless in its use of power (Ellul 27). The book of Nahum describes Nineveh as a "city of blood" (3:1) and a place of "endless cruelty" (3:19). Nineveh was a place far from God, and Nineveh was one of Israel's great enemies. Interestingly, even though Nineveh is portrayed as a sinful city, it is also one that God wants to redeem. The portrayal of Nineveh as a city God loves is especially interesting because Jonah seems to have been written at a time when Israel had strayed from God, yet the Lord had pity on Israel and forgave its people.

**Historicity.** Throughout most of Jewish and Christian history, the book has been accepted as historical. In the past two centuries, many have questioned its historicity and viewed it primarily as a parable (Childs 421). Evidence supports both conclusions but

neither conclusively. The primary evidence for Jonah being a historical document is threefold. First is the apparent fact that Jonah was a real person being mentioned in both Jonah and 2 Kings. Second, Jesus compares his ministry to that of Jonah's and seems to accept the reality of the big fish. Third, Jesus also seemed to believe that Nineveh did repent. The belief that the story is a parable is twofold. First, some who support this view do not hold to the possibility of supernatural involvement inherent in the story. Second, and more important, is the fact that no historical evidence indicates Nineveh ever repented other than in Jonah. The Israelites who first read this book would have known that Nineveh did not repent and would have judged the rest of the book in that light. Jesus spoke as if Nineveh did repent, but in the full ministry area of what Jesus said, one does not have to infer that he took the repentance as literal as opposed to figurative.

The evidence is inconclusive. The importance of the book does not rest in its literal or allegorical interpretation. The fundamental thrust of the book is twofold: God as the creator of all and God as the incredible lover of all. Jonah is more than a fish story. It is a story the Church needs to hear today.

Some very important themes are found in this wonderful book. From them come some remarkable implications for evangelizing the never churchd not only in today's society but maybe in any society with a large number of never-churched persons.

### **Major Themes in Jonah**

A number of important themes are present in Jonah. They are each mentioned briefly in the section that follows.

**The Lord and creator God.** The author reveals Yahweh's lordship over nature primarily through God's interaction with Jonah. God uses natural forces and creatures in order to bring Jonah in line with God's will. The Lord caused a great storm (1:4) in order

to turn Jonah from his errant path. In 1:9 the author includes Jonah's quotation of a Hebrew creed, which praises God as creator of the land and sea. The Lord calmed the storm when the sailors threw Jonah into the raging sea (1:12-15). God's lordship over the animal kingdom is evident in 1:17 where the text records that Yahweh provided a large fish to swallow Jonah. After Jonah repented, the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spit Jonah up on the dry land (2:10). God's lordship over nature is also shown in God's use of the bush to shade Jonah (4:6). God appointed the bush and made it come over Jonah. Finally, God's power is shown by his preparation of a sultry east wind to make Jonah weary (4:8). God uses nature itself and the forces of nature to bring Jonah to the place where God wants him. Though God uses his power over creation, Jonah portrays him as using it for good moral purposes (Allen 192). In the end, Jonah must still decide because God did not use nature to the point of coercion.

The book also emphasizes God's lordship over, and concern for, humanity. God's concern is evident from the very beginning where God tells Jonah to cry out against Nineveh because of its wickedness (1:2). God wanted the Ninevites to be a righteous people. In 4:2 God tells Jonah to cry out not so God could destroy Nineveh but so that he would forgive the city. Jonah's expectation of forgiveness is important. The God that Jonah worships is not one who destroys without mercy but one who is, "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing" (4:2). God's concern for Jonah is clear in 1:17 where God saves Jonah with the fish even though Jonah expects death as the penalty for his disobedience (1:12).

God's lordship over humanity is also manifest in the condemnation of idol worship in 2:8. All people are to be loyal to Yahweh and worship Yahweh alone, for he is the only Lord. God's lordship is also revealed in the conversion of the sailors and the

Ninevites. God is not just Lord of the Jews but also the Gentiles, and God wants the Gentiles to know that he is their God. The climax of God's lordship over and concern for humanity is in 4:10-11 where God tells Jonah of the great effort he has put into and the great love he has for the Ninevite people. Jonah's concern for the bush is used to show God's great concern for the people of Nineveh. God works through human agents, but Jonah does not portray Yahweh as one who controls the free will of humanity. He will use his power to sway humans, but they still have freedom to obey or disobey though clear consequences are in place for disobedience. The Lord uses natural (1:4-2:10; 4:6-9) and human (1:10-16; 3:3-4) means in order to fulfill his loving, redemptive purpose for creation and all humanity.

**God pursues.** God wants to save all peoples of every nation and race. A dominant thrust of the book is that God wants to save, make provision for, and deliver all people. This theme is shown in God's dealing with the Ninevites, the sailors, and Jonah himself.

The book is structured around God's commissioning of Jonah to cry out against Nineveh (1:2; 3:2). Jonah knew that God wanted him to cry out against Nineveh so that God could save the city (4:2). When the Ninevites did repent and turn to the Lord, the Lord turned from his wrath (3:10). The idea is not only that God saved them when they repented but also that God pursued them until they repented. God sent a person to show them salvation. That person fled, but God kept after that person until he preached judgment to Nineveh. God is not content to sit back and wait and see if his people repent; rather, he pursues them until they return to him.

The sailors are mentioned in only a few verses, but they serve to confirm this idea that God wants to save all peoples. The author goes out of the way to emphasize the sailors' conversion. Initially great emphasis is placed on the idea that the Ninevites are

heathen and worship many gods (1:5-6). Late in the book, however, their conversion is shown in the sailors' pleas, sacrifices to, and vows made to the Lord (1:14-16). The author did not have to mention these conversions. If Jonah is just a story about a man running away from the Lord, then these conversions are a diversion from the primary point. Since this book is really about a God who pursues his people and a God who wants all people to know him, this description of the sailors is important. The author showed the great importance of God's desire for the sailors to turn to him even if that meant using a wayward prophet.

God's desire to deliver and provide for all people is finally shown in Jonah himself. Even though Jonah ran away, God caused the storm on the sea, and God provided the fish to save Jonah (1:17). With the fish the readers observe that Jonah is at least partially saved before he repents. Full salvation, however, does not come until Jonah gives praise to God. Obviously God pursues Jonah, desiring Jonah's obedience but not willing to take away his free will.

**God's relentless good will.** Jonah contains a number of examples of God expressing a desire or will in the book of Jonah. One is when God commands Jonah to cry out against Nineveh (1:2; 3:2). Another is God's desire not to punish Nineveh (4:2). When Jonah does not obey God in 1:3, God does not give up but pursues Jonah (1:3-2:10) until he obeys (3:1-4). These desires are ultimately lived out, though a long gap exists between the expressed desire and the reality. Jonah is slow to get there, but once he does, the people and king respond almost immediately (3:5-10). God had a will in each case that he sought to be realized. If God's will is not followed, as in the case of Jonah and the Ninevites, God is relentless in pursuing them to heed his call. In every case, God's

will is ultimately good. For example, the Lord sends a terrible storm, which was terrifying, but which God intended for the good of both Jonah and the Ninevites.

**God's forgiveness.** God forgives not only his people but also the worst pagan sinner imaginable. The worst imaginable for most Jews of the day were the Ninevites. The structure of the book implies that Jonah's dismay at God's forgiveness of Nineveh is one of the central points the author was trying to make. This idea relates to God's love for all people, as discussed earlier, but it goes deeper for this theme implies that Jonah was to mirror God's love.

The structure of the book supports this as a major theme in three ways. First, the book seems to come to a climax in chapter 4. If this were just a story about a fish, a man who disobeyed God, and a city that needed to repent, then a natural ending point would have been at the conclusion of chapter 3. The author moves right into new material that supports the idea that chapter 4 may contain the central thrust of the book.

Second, in chapter 4 the reader is told the reasons for both Yahweh's and Jonah's prior actions. The reasons why Jonah fled and why God pursued are spelled out in 4:2 where God is shown to be merciful and Jonah knew God was ready to relent from punishing Nineveh. That Jonah truly did not care for Nineveh's welfare and did not want God to forgive the city is revealed in 4:9-11. From the historical ministry area, scholars know that Assyria was a ruthless nation, and Jonah abhorred the idea that God would forgive the people for their atrocities.

The final structural element that supports the notion that Jonah's relationship with God is a central element of the book is the way in which Jonah is consistently addressed through the book. With the exceptions of 1:1 and 3:1, which are God's commands for Jonah to cry out, Jonah is always addressed in the form of a question (1:6; 1:8; 1:11; 4:4;



4:9; 4:11). The last three questions come from God. The climax of the entire book is in 4:11 where God's great love and care are revealed. Also, the reader is left with an uncertain conclusion. Scholars do not know how Jonah responded to the questions which leaves the question addressed to the reader almost as much as to Jonah himself.

### **Theological Implications for Twenty-First Century Evangelism**

The book of Jonah presents a variety of implications for evangelism and ministry in a postmodern climate. Some of these implications are true for every age, but some have unique manifestations in the present culture.

**God's love.** The Israelites knew that God loved sinners. They knew that God loved them when they sinned, and they knew that God even loved pagan sinners. Jonah knew God loved the detestable Ninevites, and that is why he did not want to go to them. He did not want to tell them to repent because he did not want God to hold back from his punishment, which he knew God would do. Jonah and the ancient Israelites understood this and the teachings are relevant for Christians. Christ came for the lost and sacrificed himself for all humanity so all might share in his glory. Culture is becoming more and more secular. More and more people in the United States seem to have strayed from God's love. God still, however, desires to save them. He longs to hold back his punishment. He yearns to welcome sinners into his kingdom because he loves them.

**Going to the city.** The author of Jonah does not imply God loves cities more than other areas, but a city is the place God sends Jonah. When God sought to show his forgiveness to a people who needed repentance more than anyone else, those people lived in a city. Of the people the Israelites despised more than any other, they were people of a city. When God wanted to show that any people could be redeemed, he used as an object

lesson of people from a city. Nineveh was exceptional in its tremendous separation from Yahweh, yet this is exactly where God sent Jonah.

Today urban centers are the pagan outposts of this culture. They represent all that is good and bad in postmodern society. They show the future of Western society as a whole barring divine intervention. Cities are the center of paganism. Pagans used to be those outside the city walls, but today urban centers are filled with pagans (Murphy). Cities are filled with people who do not heed the commands and desires of Yahweh just like the Ninevites. When Scripture provides a vision of the kingdom of God, it is a city. If Christians want to see the fullness of God's love for a pagan world, one good place to go is the city. If Christians want to be missionaries to the some of the most difficult cultures in which to advance the gospel, go to the city. If Christians want to see God's forgiveness rain down as he desires, go to the city. The Word of God came to Jonah saying, "Go," and from Jesus, Christians are given the same command: Go to all the world (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, Jonah's problem is the Church's problem. He went only when he became clear God was going to pursue him, even to death, because Jonah was his messenger.

**Going to the pagan.** Jonah is the first example in the Bible of God sending a prophet to another nation. Before Jonah all the prophets were sent to Israel. The prophets were sent to proclaim God's love and judgment and to remind the Israelites that they belonged to God. In Jonah that Word goes to a foreign people. The Ninevites were previously thought to be a people outside God's covenant. The Ninevites never heard of Yahweh. They did not know they needed to hear about this God or be made holy, yet God sent Jonah to them.

As Jonah went to the pagans thousands of years ago, so must Christians today.

Today's pagans are similar in that they either do not know the biblical God or have heard of him and are not sure they really want to know him. Nevertheless, God calls the Church to proclaim the good news to every people including those who have never heard his name.

To proclaim the good news requires making a journey. For Jonah it meant a long walk. Nineveh was around six hundred miles as the crow flies and approximately 750 miles by road (Fernando 26). Nineveh was not an easy place to go for Jonah. One did not accidentally end up in Nineveh. The journey to Nineveh was difficult, and reaching today's pagans requires a difficult journey as well. The Church needs to adapt the methods and processes by which it transmits the timeless gospel message and engages people who have practices that are both unfamiliar and uncomfortable to people of the faith. The Church must act like lizards that go seeking food as opposed to frogs that wait for food to come to them (Sweet, FaithQuakes 27). Reaching out to people outside a church is difficult in any generation, but it will be especially so in this generation. Just like Jonah, this journey will take the Church to areas where it has never been, but the Church has ventured into uncharted areas before, and it must again.

**The pagan repents.** Jonah's great fear was that the people of Nineveh would repent and that God would, in turn, relent from his promised destruction. The people who had been the great enemies of God changed their hearts and minds and repented. The same is happening today. People who were enemies of the biblical God are hearing the stories and giving their lives to Yahweh. They see the life of Jesus, and they repent in spectacular ways. The faith journey started, however, when followers of Christ obediently went where God commanded when he commanded. One essential element of

the Church is to go to the pagan and love them. Jonah neither loved the Ninevites, nor wanted them to repent. Jonah realized that God wanted to share his *hesed*, his covenant love, with people who were not Israelites, and Jonah was furious (Fernando 61). This love was reserved only for the Jews, according to Jonah. Most in the Church voice the desire for the pagan to repent and come to faith, and yet few churches seem willing to go the extra mile to share the gospel with them. The Church often acts as if God's *hesed* is reserved only for it. Few actually verbalize this selfishness, but actions portray it. Fortunately, the Christian God is a patient and relentless God who goes to the end of the Earth to reach the people he loves.

Today the Church needs to go into the new philosophical cultures being born around the world. These cultures are as foreign to the philosophy and mind-set into which many in the Church were born as Nineveh was from Jerusalem. This road will be a long and often difficult journey for the Church to make, but the Lord is calling his people to go to these new nations. In the West, the new culture into which the Church must go is the nation of postmodernism.

### **The Study in Brief**

The review of relevant literature in the next chapter includes a discussion of postmodernism, Generation X, and the new urban horizon. Relevant contemporary writings on the subjects are considered and included for each section. Concluding Chapter 2 is a discussion of the five key ministry areas for evangelism that arise out of the literature.

Chapter 3 details the design of the study and explains how the data was collected and evaluated. The design of the project, the research methods, and method of data analysis are discussed. Chapter 4 provides a conversation of the findings of my

questionnaire submitted to never churched persons. Chapter 5 includes a summary and interpretation of the data, a discussion of the important findings, and finally a discussion of implications for the Church.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to discover how to evangelize this population effectively, I need to review the literature in at least four areas. First, is a review of Generation X itself including unique background issues, primary influences, and an appropriate response for the church to this population. Second, this literature review discusses the topic of never-churched persons including their religious background and how they differ from people who do have a background in a church.

Third, since never-churched persons seem to be concentrated in urban centers, this study also looked at the growing urbanization of society and how it impacts the Church. Fourth, the study looked at evangelism. Out of the literature emerged a few dominant ministry areas in which evangelism takes place, namely one-on-one witnessing, worship services, small groups, service projects, and narrative evangelism. I discuss these ministry areas and their relevance in today's culture.

To place this discussion in its proper ministry area, however, a reflection on the overarching issue of postmodernism is necessary. Postmodernism is the cultural tidal wave now flooding Western society and leading the culture away from the Church. Generation X grew up in the infancy of postmodernism, and it pervades this generation. So to understand the ministry areas for effective evangelism, a discussion of postmodernism's origins, and its current impact on society are important. Throughout this literature review, the book of Jonah is used as a theological guide to evangelizing never churched Generation X.

## **Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is one of, if not the, driving forces in Western culture today. Postmodernism has affected everything from religion, philosophy, and pop culture to political systems, family relationships, and economic realities. Because of these dynamics, the nature of the postmodern ministry area must be examined. Some may not believe the culture has changed. It has not only changed but been transformed by postmodernism. If the Church is to survive, if not thrive, it needs to come to grips with the reality that modernism, if not already dead, is on its last legs. Sally Morgenthaler writes, "Christianity cannot seize the day as long as it remains captive to a Western, rationalistic, institutionalized death grip that saps spiritual vitality" (80).

### **The Enlightenment and Modernism**

Postmodernism is a philosophy that developed out of modernism. Modernism itself grew out of the Enlightenment. The philosophy and mind-set behind modernism needs to be recapped here in order to show how postmodernism has transformed underlying ideas of modernism. Modernism was rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy and worldview. The Enlightenment movement, which began in the seventeenth century and lasted through the beginning of the nineteenth century, was based on five core beliefs. First was the belief that reason could explain virtually every observation. As science blossomed people began to think that a human's ability to reason could explain everything that had once been left to magic and religion. Indeed, many once unexplainable phenomena were being explained through reason. Enlightenment philosophers and thinkers thought reason could explain all of the created order.

Second, the Enlightenment taught that nature was ordered. Again, through scientific observation, people began to believe nature was thoroughly understandable.

The Enlightenment helped spawn the idea that every observable phenomenon could one day be explained. Related to this is the third key element to Enlightenment thought—the belief in the harmony of the universe. Enlightenment philosophers tended to believe in an ordered cosmos. Everything operates under universal laws though scientists may not have discovered all the applicable laws.

Fourth was the rise of individual autonomy. As civilization advanced, urbanized and democratized, people became seemingly less and less dependent on each other. The individual became the focus of society as opposed to tribes or people groups. Individual beliefs and desires triumphed over communitarianism.

Finally, the Enlightenment taught the inevitability of human progress. Humanity is on an ever-blossoming journey toward perfection. Devastating cycles of the past had been discovered. Important mistakes would not be made again. Science, knowledge, and philosophy were leading to a wonderful, ever prosperous, and joyful future (Grenz 68-70).

Modernism is rooted in this Enlightenment mind-set but it expands on its tenets. The optimism of the Enlightenment was destined to wane, and modernism was the result. Modernist philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant gave voice to the rising questions. Stanley Grenz sums up the Enlightenment and Modernist projects well:

The modern, post-Enlightenment mind assumes that knowledge is certain, objective and good. It presupposes that the rational, dispassionate self can obtain such knowledge. It presupposes that the knowing self peers at the mechanistic world as a neutral observer armed with the scientific method. The modern knower engages in the knowing process believing that knowledge inevitably leads to progress and that science coupled with education will free humankind from our vulnerability to nature and all forms of social bondage.... At the heart of this society is the desire to rationally manage life, on the assumption that scientific advancement and technology provide the means to improving the quality of human life. (81)



Modernism and the Enlightenment failed. George G. Hunter, III is correct when he writes, “The pillars of ‘modern’ Western civilization erected during the Enlightenment are now crumbling.... We are now in a period of culture lag—in which most people in the Western world are not yet as aware as scientists and philosophers that the Enlightenment is over.” (How to Reach 38). Postmodernism is entrenched in Western culture even though some people fail to acknowledge its development. Fortunately and unfortunately, postmodernism rejects many aspects of the modernist and Enlightenment worldview. This rejection is good as it pertains to the philosophical elements that were not Christian. The downside is that postmodernism does not overcome some of the potential dangers of modernism such as secularism, privatization, and localization (Guiness 48). Rather, it magnifies them so that the Christian movement is now dealing with the full consequences that are addressed later in this chapter. Before dealing with the consequences of postmodernism, however, a discussion of postmodern philosophy’s development needs to take place.

### **Development of Postmodern Philosophy**

Arnold Toynbee, in his Study of History, most likely first coined the term “postmodern” (Grenz 2). The term postmodern sought to give definition to the time period after the rise and decline of modernism. Many philosophers look to Friederic Wilhelm Nietzsche as the father of postmodern thought. Whereas modernity taught that knowledge was good and could be accessed, Nietzsche did not believe humans could access reality. He did not believe in a “true world” but that everything was “perspectival in appearance,” basically that each person’s worldview is constructed from within their own experience (14-15). As Melvyn Stokes writes, “Nietzsche repudiated the Enlightenment idea that truth could be achieved by means of reason ... because it

depended on an exact fit between subjective representations (words, images) and an external reality” (214). In other words, no facts exist because everything is subjective. All humans can provide are subjective interpretations. This being the case, morality is a construction that comes from within a person, not an objective, transcendent reality. This view of knowledge had a dramatic effect on three later philosophers who are very important in postmodern thought—Jean-Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Francois Lyotard.

Jean-Jacques Derrida questions the notion of understanding knowledge by attacking its very foundation—language. He believes most Western philosophers assumed a foundational essence of language that could be known (11-12). Derrida thought people could not represent an objective reality using thoughts and statements. Every thought or statement about truth differed because of the perspective of the person; therefore meaning changes over time and varies from person to person. Language cannot give an exact definition of reality; therefore, objective truth cannot exist. Equally as important, humans do not have the ability to step outside their own constructions of reality (Grenz 43). These ideas conflicted with the ideas of structuralism advocated by Ferdinand de Saussure. Structuralists teach that language is a system with rules and regulations that provide for understanding within a social system (Sim, “Postmodernism and Philosophy” 4); therefore, language can implicitly represent reality and meaning. Derrida says no structural system in any social system, much less between social systems, provides objective knowledge. Everything depends on the reader’s perspective. Truth, therefore, if it exists at all, only comes from an individual perspective, thus introducing the term that describes Derrida’s thought, “Deconstructionism.”

Michel Foucault builds on a portion of Derrida's understanding of knowledge. Both are unique in that they share a number of poststructuralist assumptions. First, neither believe in authors, only discourse. Second, meaning is always contingent and provisional, never fixed and final. Third, all thinking is characterized by fragmentation and incompleteness. Fourth, no real universal categories or grand theories exist (meta-narratives) (Stokes 206). In addition Foucault and Derrida, along with other early postmodern philosophers, are unique in that they believe Western scholars strayed over the previous three centuries and erred when they believed in some specific philosophical tenets—that an objective body of knowledge exists and is waiting to be discovered, that those scholars actually possess such knowledge, that knowledge is neutral or value free, and that the pursuit of knowledge benefits all humanity rather than just a specific class (Grenz 131). Foucault builds on Derrida with his belief that knowledge is rooted in power and violence. For Foucault, “the act of knowing is always an act of violence” (Grenz 133) because knowledge is always used, and sought, for power. Whoever has power will use language to justify their existence and, therefore, distorts language.

Lyotard, in turn, builds on Foucault. He argues that knowledge is the world's most important commodity and that whoever controls knowledge, controls power. His main contribution to postmodern thought is his belief that knowledge is communicated via narratives within a culture (Sim, “Postmodernism and Philosophy” 8). If a narrative is what transfers knowledge from person to person and generation to generation, and if knowledge entails a desire for power and control, then narratives contribute to the world's violence; therefore, the West needs to get rid of its grand narratives, or meta-narratives, according to Lyotard, because they contribute to the world's struggles. They do not represent truth anyway since meaning is based on the reader's perspective. After

all, “history ... is a series of metaphors rather than an account of things that actually happened, and since every story carries the corrupting perspective of its author, all texts and truths must be deconstructed” (Kelly 11).

### **Consequences of Postmodern Philosophy**

The consequences, if not evident from the previous discussion, are important and imposing. In addition, the tenets of postmodernism that have already been embraced by much of Western culture have led to massive societal change. In fact, some suggest the ongoing cultural shifts and turmoil rival the rise of modernity from the Middle Ages (Grenz 2). Though I think it too soon to tell the long-term impact, clearly postmodernism has dramatically affected Western culture.

Below are some of the most important positive and negative consequences of postmodernism. The discussion is only cursory, but coming to grips with the consequences of postmodernism is crucial to understanding Generation X’s mind-set and effectively sharing the gospel with them.

**Truth.** As philosophers questioned the nature of language, they naturally questioned the nature of truth. Today, truth is basically irrelevant for many in Western culture. Approximately 75 percent of Generation Xers do not believe in any concept of ultimate truth (Ford and Denny 79; Zustiak 71). Ford and Denny believe that for Generation Xers subjective experience supersedes logic and objective facts and that God and truth are relative. In addition, community is more important than truth (114). Francis A. Schaeffer is right when he writes, “What is taught is that there is no final truth, no meaning, no absolutes, that it is not only that we have not found truth and meaning, but that they do not exist” (23). An experience, not truth, is the key. Most of the time when

the word “truth” is used, it is conditional and localized. In different times and different places, “truth” may be something all together different. Craig Miller affirms this reality:

Postmodernity is the condition of living in a sea of “truths,” each with its own reality and set beliefs. The individual is left with a decision to believe in something or to drift aimlessly in a sea of information. Rather than the culture or the society dictating the truth, the person in the midst of the Postmodern condition has to decide what is the truth for him or her. Thus truth is not something that is found. Instead, truth is something that you create for yourself. (55)

An idea is the truth for a specific person or group at that time and in that place.

When postmoderns do create truth, they do so in community. The importance of community is fleshed out in further detail later in this study, but it needs to be touched upon here in the ministry area of truth formation. For postmoderns, truth is something that grows out of a community. Truth is not inherent to a culture but rather something that blooms from within it. The needs and desires of the community form the foundations of truth that they create. Truth is processed relationally (Celek and Zander 114). Inherent in this creation of truth by community is the inability for someone outside the community to critique it (Long 71). Since the community creates the truth, only those from within the community are free to critique it.

**Authority.** As truth was questioned, all other authorities were questioned as well. Foucault led this line of thought. Since one cannot be sure of knowledge, no overarching authority figures or institutions are valid, whether political, religious, philosophical, etc. to which one should give ultimate allegiance. In addition, no common standards or measurements on the basis of which people can pass judgments are accepted in postmodernism. Furthermore, the foundation crumbles on which to base value judgments especially moral ones. Individuals are free to create their own authoritative, moral structures and free to give or not give allegiance to any overarching system. Individuals

or groups are not free to make moral judgments about any system other than their own because no common foundation of morality and values exists.

**Meta-narrative.** Jean-Francois Lyotard gives the defining postmodern view of the meta-narrative: “I define postmodernism as incredulity toward meta-narratives” (iv). One of the greatest challenges postmodernism presents to Christianity is its denial of all meta-narratives. As Leonard Sweet writes, “Postmoderns are deeply suspicious about any and all meta-narratives that provide all encompassing authority for everyone everywhere (SoulTsunami 385). Since no objective truth exists, no overarching story exists, true or false, that gives basis to a society and, which in turn, judges individuals within a society. The world’s great meta-narratives, especially Western ones, that make truth claims are a priori invalid since no basis exists on which to make truth claims (Dawn 46).

**Experience.** With no overarching meaning in life being derived from a meta-narrative, people are left with only their momentary experiences; therefore, one of the great developments in postmodern society is the increasing importance of experience. In fact, for some people, experience is definitive of life itself. This emphasis on experience is true for both Baby Boomers and Generation Xers (Benedict and Miller 35), but Generation Xers have made experience even more defining. Boomers used their financial abilities to provide for more elaborate and intense experiences over and above life’s necessities, but Generation Xers have made experience a necessity itself. Not only is experience necessary, but it must also be dynamic. With no overarching meaning, ultimate pleasure must come in this life; therefore, the desire for experience becomes even more intense and multi-sensory (Slaughter, Out on the Edge 62). Eddie Gibbs pinpoints the focus on experience for postmoderns:

The world of the Postmodern is a world of image rather than substance. They are concerned with the immediate rather than the long term because history is meaningless and the future is too scary and unpredictable to contemplate. Meanwhile the present is lived out as a tumble of fleeting experiences. (24)

This topic is discussed in more depth in the section on Generation X.

**Consumerism.** Society encourages consumption at virtually every level and in every category, and this consumption-based reality is most encouraged and a keystone of postmodernism. With no overarching meta-narrative, one is left only with the desire to “experience” in this world. To experience, one must most often consume. Indeed, a person’s actions as a consumer often defines one’s identity (Watson 63). This mind-set is real not only in the local Best Buy but also in the church around the corner. Stephen Carter tells of this reality:

If people are not happy with their religion or thinks their religion is inconvenient, give it up! If you can’t remarry because you have the wrong religious belief, well, hey, believe something else! If you can’t take your exam because of a Holy Day, get a new Holy Day! If the government decides to destroy your sacred land, just make some other lands sacred.... And through all of this trivializing rhetoric runs the subtle but unmistakable message: pray if you like, worship if you must, but whatever you do, do not on any account take your religion seriously. (15)

Though Carter may overstate the situation, postmoderns are clearly addicted to choice and consumption at every level, including the Church.

**Individualism and community.** Just as postmodernism has affected consumerism, it has also affected the communal realm. Though the transition to the postmodern world has undoubtedly brought about a drive for community, which is addressed later in this paper, it is a community that looks much different from days past. Community in postmodern society is primarily focused on the individual.

In the past, community was, for the most part, preordained for an individual. A person was born into a family, tribe, ethnic group, etc. People were stuck with their community for better or worse. Wayne Booth points out this reality:

People in all previous cultures were not seen as essentially independent, isolated units with totally independent values; rather, they were mysteriously complex persons overlapping with other persons in ways that made it legitimate to enforce certain kinds of responsibility to the community.... [Persons were not] “individuals” at all but overlapping members of one another. (78-79)

Today, if individuals overlap, they do so only because they choose to. Community today is chosen. No longer is community based on blood but, rather, on one’s own desire. The designer community is where people choose the depth, breadth, and nature of their community based on their momentary needs; therefore, relationships are often transient (Guder et al. 37). Community is now commoditized and mass-customized according to individual taste (Sweet, SoulTsunami 292); therefore, though community is important in postmodern society, its foundation is individualism, not communitarianism.

**Microclimates.** Along with the shift to greater and greater individualization comes a corresponding move toward tribalism. People are self-identifying with one or more groups often on an ever-changing basis. These groups give meaning, direction, and definition to the process of how life is lived. Grenz writes, “The Postmodern consciousness ... focuses on the group. Postmoderns live in self-contained social groups, each of which has its own language, beliefs, and values” (15). Philip Elmer-Dewitt writes, “Society is splintering into hundreds of subcultures and designer cultures each with its own language, code, and life style” (62).

This splintering is happening to such a degree that there are now subcultures within subcultures within subcultures. When I went to high school, only a few types of



groups existed—nerds, jocks, rebels, band members, Hispanics, Asians, etc. Only a handful of different groups existed on most high school campuses. Today, however, the situation has changed noticeably. The ethnic groups have subcategorized to many levels. For example, Hispanic is no longer descriptive enough. Now many Hispanic populations can be found, including Mexican Hispanics, Puerto Rican Hispanics, Cuban Hispanics, and Spanish Hispanics. Every subculture is experiencing the same splintering. The growth has been so striking that the term “subculture” no longer adequately describes this phenomena; therefore, I use the term “microclimate” to describe the splintering now evident in society.

Within any high school today, or any local neighborhood, much less city as a whole, one finds a variety of microclimates in which people identify themselves, and the options are ever increasing. Gerard Kelly writes, “New tribes spring up with unprecedented speed as subcultures give birth to sub-subcultures, groups within groups gathering around ever more complex and specific distinctions—and often replicated in mirror-image groups thousands of miles and several continents away” (153). With the rise of the Internet, people are now engaged in virtual microclimates with people they have never met face-to-face. Sometimes this increasing tendency toward microclimates can be helpful because it provides people who previously had no community with a group with which to identify. The downside is that these microclimates seem to be splintering society instead of uniting it.

**Globalism.** Globalism is an important outgrowth of postmodernism. One cannot watch television today without observing the massive influence of globalism. Maybe the best example is the Simpsons. This phenomenally successful show put, and has kept, FOX on the map of network television. One of the reasons for its success is that it models

the globalized lives of many Westerners. In this small town, a variety of ethnic, religious, and philosophical groups are represented. They all seem to get along rather well together. Globalism is an important consequence of postmodernism.

The world has become smaller with the technological advances that have impacted society in recent years. Today a person can communicate with virtually anyone, anywhere, and at anytime. With the communication revolution has come a questioning of which societies are best. Many people around the world assumed the West provided the social and economic models the rest of the world should emulate. Now many have serious doubts. Westerners are now forced to deal with Eastern philosophy and religion while people in the few remaining Communist countries are exposed to the merits and downfalls of capitalism on a daily basis. Try as people and nations may to stop the spread of globalism its tentacles continue to spread. The effects have been both positive and negative. For example the world's needs are made known in a timely manner with the advancement of communication. Additionally, advances in science that used to take years, if not decades, are now available almost immediately. Globalism does present challenges.

For instance, many people have no idea who their neighbors are, and often they do not care. The world used to be organized by geography so that people in a small area knew the others in their immediate vicinity while not knowing those in different regions. Now, however, people organize according to culture and microclimate (Webber, Ancient-Future Faith 71). As the CEO of MTV Europe remarks, "An 18 year old in Denmark has more in common with an 18 year old born in France than either has with elders in their own country" (qtd. in Romanowski 226). Identity is no longer automatically tied to family, which used to be the greatest bond, but is found in a

person's microclimate (Sweet, AquaChurch 144). On the whole, many benefits to globalism exist, but the effects on the world have been dramatic not only on society but on the Church as well.

These are some of the dominant characteristics of postmodernism in Western culture. Each of these has an impact on the ministry area for effective evangelism with never churchd persons. Nevertheless, the Church needs to respond. First, scholars and church leaders believe a decision must be made to respond to postmodernism. Second, the Church needs to take tangible steps in order to engage the postmodern world.

A variety of responses to postmodernism are possible, but before the Church can react it must decide that a response is necessary. Though the evidence seems overwhelming, many in the Church are unaware of the need to take action.

**The need for response.** First, the Church must decide to respond knowing that the decision will determine the viability of its future. Jimmy Long knows the importance of a response:

We have a critical decision ahead of us. We can either take the assimilating road and ultimately be assimilated by the culture or we can take the road of protection and thus become irrelevant to the culture. We can choose the unchanging road and face cultural extinction. We can take the battling road and face being annihilated by the culture or winning the cultural war but losing the battle for the souls of people in the culture. Or we can take the road of influence, being prophetic in the culture and providing hope for Generation X and the coming Postmodern generations.  
(34)

Living as if the Church is still in the heyday of modernism will lead to a slow and painful death. Indeed, many of the pains rampant in the mainline denominations are gnawing precisely because the Church has not faced the clear consequences of postmodernism on society today.

For instance, Mike Regele observes that if the current decline in faith involvement continues, less than half of all Americans will still hold to some level of active faith by the year 2013 (143). The numbers are horrific, but many authors, including myself, believe not only that fewer people are going to be involved in a church but that the culture will become more and more hostile to the Christian faith in the coming years (Easum 1). Leonard Sweet takes this potentially hostile future one step further writing, “In the Third Millennium ... anti-Christian sentiment will continue to rise. Far from the Christian church as a majority force in culture, in postmodern culture the Christian faith is a minority movement, its influences being expunged from the larger culture” (FaithQuakes 36). He believes Christianity is already “culturally as well as socially and religiously disestablished” (SoulTsunami 45). Louis Dupre agrees that Christian culture is in trouble:

The West appears to have said its definitive farewell to a Christian culture.... Our secular colleagues are happy to recognize the debt our civilization owes to the Christian faith to the extent that the faith, having been absorbed by culture itself, has become simply another cultural artifact. Christianity has become a historical factor subservient to a secular culture rather than functioning as the creative power it once was. (654)

William Easum and Thomas Bandy are correct when they write that Christendom is dead (34). Clearly, the parts of the Church that decide to respond effectively to postmodernism will be the ones that survive and thrive in this new century. In the postmodern world, the Church cannot be silent or withdrawn. It must be seen and heard or it will be relegated to obscurity (Pippert 85).

### **The Church's Response to Postmodernism**

The Church needs to respond at a variety of levels each of which affects both the Church's ministry and its evangelism. First, the Church needs to engage the culture with

the gospel. This engagement can only happen by bringing the gospel culture to a secular culture. The Church needs to “go” to this new culture just as Jonah did. Some argue that if Christians engage the culture, the gospel will be watered down or somehow changed. Anytime the Church brings the gospel to a new people a tension flares between engaging the new culture and watering down the good news. The Church is challenged by what is Christian and nonnegotiable and what is negotiable because it is purely a cultural form of the gospel. The Church needs to recognize that every Christian community is affected by the culture sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. Even an individual Christian community’s presentation and understanding of the gospel is colored by the culture (Dyrness 19; Newbigin 144; Sweet, AquaChurch 79). Sweet coins a new word—inculturate, which essentially means to ingrain or make an idea real. Sweet writes, “The issue for the incarnational Christian is not whether the Gospel will be incultured in their electronic age, but how the Gospel will be incultured; not whether our social ministry area shapes the experience of the Gospel, but how and when” (AquaChurch 80). The gospel will be incultured, but it must inculturate with the goal of transforming the culture, not being itself transformed by the culture, and the culture cannot let go of the essentials of the gospel. The Church must inculturate the gospel and even embrace parts of the culture, but the Church needs to be conscious of how it engage the culture and aware that if some elements in the culture infiltrate the Church they will pollute the Church and its message. The Church must remain Christian. The Church must remain orthodox yet free to be culturally indigenous on negotiable issues. The two are inseparable.

Second, the Church must engage postmodernism on the philosophical front. The Church needs to recognize that some of the fundamental complaints about the Church in

regards to power are accurate. All Christians need to do is look at the Crusades to know that their forebears frequently used their power and knowledge to coerce individuals and people groups. Sometimes they had good intentions but often power was the goal. Lesslie Newbigin writes, “Part of the reason for the rejection of dogma (truth claims) is that it has for so long been entangled with coercion, with political power, and so with denial of freedom” (10). This critique, of course, is not new, and the Church is not alone in its abuse of power. Nevertheless, corruption is part of the Church’s past.

Even though the Church has made mistakes, it must not let go of the truth the Church represents. As Christians in the postmodern world, the Church needs to embrace the truth of the gospel unambiguously. The Church cannot, for instance, let go of the belief in a Christian meta-narrative for the Christian story is ultimate truth. The Church must proclaim the truth of the Christian meta-narrative humbly if it wants to be heard.

Part of the way the Church presents the truth without others developing the notion that all it wants is power is to admit to the Church’s failures, admit to areas of mystery, and allow the Church’s faith to be questioned. As the Church challenges other people’s beliefs, it must allow beliefs to be challenged as well and be able to live in what will sometimes be ambiguous dialogue. As Gibbs writes, “Only in so far as Christians are prepared for their own position to be scrutinized at close quarters will they be in a position to persuade postmoderns to critique their own assumptions” (28). If the Church is defensive instead of lovingly proactive, it will fail to reach most postmoderns.

Some Christian postmodern philosophers believe that the way to engage postmoderns is to have what Andrew J. Dell’olio calls “Religious Inclusivism” (269). He writes that Christians need to “maintain that divine truth is revealed definitively in Jesus Christ, but that Christianity does not enjoy full possession of the truth” (269). He tries to

walk the balance between pluralism and exclusivism. According to Dell'olio, the Christian faith is unique and all one needs for salvation, but God has partially revealed himself in other religions. His point is that if Christians want to engage other faiths in dialogues about truth, Christians need to see the truth, sometimes biblical truth, in other religions. He follows John Caputo's line of thought that Christians need to be hypersensitive to other faiths (270). He believes Christians can be sensitive while, at the same time, holding to the fullness of the truth coming in Jesus Christ. Newbigin would agree. He writes, "It is essential to the integrity of our witness to this new reality [postmodernism] that we recognize that to be its witnesses does not mean to be the possessors of all truth" (12). Nevertheless, Christians must hold onto the truth as Christians. Christians need to remember that Christ is the full expression of God in human form. Christians need to be careful in this argument because of the easy transition to pluralism. Jesus is the fullness of God, and he is all that is necessary for salvation.

The Church needs to help people see how their personal story is part of God's story. Though the overarching meta-narrative may be questioned, individual narratives are welcomed and sometimes demanded in the postmodern culture (Henderson 29). Individuals witnessing with their narratives will help people see the convergence of their lives and the truth of the biblical narrative. For community and individualism, the Church needs to help people see that the individual is only complete in community. Moderns privatized the experience of evangelism, the Christian presence, and even community (Guder 117). Daniel V. A. Olson believes this privatization hurt the Christian witness:

Privatization means that the public culture and the public institutions of society no longer reinforce one's beliefs and religious identity. No longer is religious identity taken for granted as an indistinguishable aspect of one's identity as a member of society. One's personal contacts outside the private sphere, especially in the work place, may not share or reinforce

one's religious identity. In fact, discussion of religious identity or specific beliefs may be considered inappropriate. (34)

This rise in individualism took place in part to avoid the conflict over truth claims, but no matter what the reason, Christians need to show biblical faith is more than individualism. Christians need to show in their own living how biblical community fulfills their dreams and desires as individuals. Christians may have to let go of some of their individualistic ideas and goals, but if the community of faith lives out true biblical community, many will see that community is more desirable than absolute independence. Transforming Christians' individualistic culture will be difficult and will happen only when the Church sees community as primary, not the individual (Nash 100).

The only other response to be discussed here relates to engaging microclimates. To transform the culture, Christians must engage at the level of microclimates. No one particular model of church or evangelism dominates anymore. Multiple methods exist for Anglos, African-Americans, and Asians, in the inner city, the suburbs, or the country. The Church must engage at a local level if we want to engage this culture at any level. Tex Sample writes, "Understanding and engagement with a people involves the most careful attention to the participation in their indigenous practices" (18). Those who engage a microclimate with the truth and practice of the gospel will have the opportunity to transform it with the good news of Christ. The Church must remember that evangelism is what necessitates engaging microclimates. The process of discipleship is where postmodern Christians will grow to see that the body of Christ transcends microclimates. If the walls put up around microclimates do not come down as one becomes a disciple, then the process of discipleship is incomplete. Effective evangelism of the never churchd will take into account the existence of microclimates.



Before closing this section, a word from Rodney Clapp is appropriate:

From the viewpoint of the radical Christian, Postmodernism carries its pains and challenges, but also its promises. For radicals, Postmodern pluralism is a social condition in which the Constantinianism that has always been a theological dead end now becomes a political and sociological dead end. There is a place for Christians in the Postmodern world, not as typically decent human beings but as unapologetic followers of the Way. There is a place for the Church in the Postmodern world, not as a sponsorial prop for nation-states but as a community called by the God explicitly named Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (32)

### **Generation X**

Having looked at some of the dominant issues in regards to postmodernism, this paper begins to focus on how postmodernism has affected Generation X.

#### **An Introduction to Generation X**

“Busters,” “Slackers,” “13th Generation,” “Baby Bummers,” “Twenty Nothings,” “The Repair Generation,” “The Marginalized Generation,” “The Recovering Generation,” “The Surviving Generation,” “The Hinge Generation” are all terms used to refer to the same group of people known as Generation X. Douglas Coupland coined the phrase “Generation X” in his book Generation X. From that point on, the group of people born from 1964 to 1975 have had a label. Some of these labels have been positive. Often they have been derogatory. Each reflects a generation struggling with identity. More important than the age brackets put on Generation X is the way Xers look at the world. Xers describe more than an age bracket—they represent a worldview (“Generation Xed” 72). As the Church seeks to bring the good news to this generation, the Church needs to understand some of its unique characteristics. Some characteristics are more obvious within certain Generation X microclimates. For example some characteristics may be more prevalent in African-American than Anglo populations, but all characteristics transfer, at some level or another, to virtually every microclimate within Generation X.

Different authors emphasize a variety of characteristics of Generation X. Some overlap, but only a few differences exist. Leith Anderson points out a few key characteristics including a lack of deferred gratification, individualism and isolation, postponed adolescence and marriage, and blurred sex roles (102). Ford and Denny focus on influences such as divorce, working parents, lack of parental expectations and boundaries, a sense of entitlement, and a lack of self-esteem (37). Geoffrey T. Holtz adds some important Generation X characteristics, including the population boom, the changing family, sexualization of children and teenagers, and drug abuse (12 ff.). Another group of authors contributes the notion of increased teenage access to money, their materialism, the importance of pop culture, and a growing sense of doubt about the future (Schieber et al. 26-27). Tom Beaudoin focuses his thoughts on four key themes, some of which overlap the authors mentioned above. His focus is on the themes of absence, technologized (un)reality, spirituality and music, and experimentation (Virtual Faith 7 ff.). All of these themes are important for Generation X. Below is a discussion of some core themes arising out of the literature that the Church must begin to grasp. Some of the issues relate and intermingle, but they are all important realities in Generation Xers' lives.

### **Community**

If Generation Xers have one driving desire, it is for community. This desire is present in everything from coffee shops and gangs. The reason Generation Xers desire it so is because so many of them experienced so little of it growing up. Generation Xers have a loneliness that is longing to be filled. This loneliness can be seen in a variety of areas of life, including architecture. Charles Jencks points out that a striking change in postmodern architecture is a return to the absent center in architecture:

A central plan is made and then architecture doesn't know what to put in the place of honor.[It reveals]: a desire for communal space, a perfectly valid celebration of what we have in common, and then the admission that there is nothing quite adequate to fill it. (282)

Many Generation Xers have a community void at the center of lives, and they do not know how to fill it (Henderson 176). This generation is begging for community that provides meaning, stability, and identity so that individuals are not so isolated (Willimon 1019). This desire for community is so strong that it overwhelms some other important issues. This desire is one of the reasons why individuals will carry out heinous crimes in order to be part of a gang, and why they will take all kinds of abuse to join a fraternity. The yearning for community is so overpowering it overwhelms what might otherwise be good judgment. Indeed, judgment and creed are much less important than community (Kelly 119).

One important reason for this intense desire for community is because of what is in many ways a breakdown in the family. Granted, sometimes divorce is an acceptable, though regrettable, biblical response to certain situations. No other generation has had to deal with divorce as Generation X (C. Miller 94). At least 40 percent of all Generation Xers are children of divorce (Ford and Denny 153). The new family model is not family but families (C. Miller 92). The rise in divorce is so great that many Generation Xers who are asked what is important to them do not even include family in the list (Zustiak 71). Family simply is not what it used to be.

George Barna shows the dramatic nature of this shift from family as the primary point of community in his book Baby Busters. Generation Xers' notion of family is radically different from the majority view from even twenty-two years ago. Now most Xers describe friends, and people with whom someone shares "close relations" or "deep

personal/emotional bonds” are more likely viewed as “family” than blood relatives (qtd. in Zustiak 169). Family is not blood but rather those with whom a person has community.

Generation X also has strong desires for community because they have seen the lack of it in Boomers and in their parents. With divorce at all-time highs for American history, families scattered around the country, and the frequency of parents moving for employment, children are begging for community. Boomers have been poor models for Generation Xers. Paula Rinehart describes Boomers’ isolation:

Most live in their own isolated boxes in the suburbs, a thousand miles from family, in communities in which they feel no roots.... They are plagued by loneliness-yet driven by demanding jobs and competing family needs. Underneath all that activity is a deep longing for a connection with God that seems real and intimate. (24)

Generation Xers know that Boomers are not good models of community.

Coincidentally, this desire for community is one reason many churches and corporations struggle to work Generation Xers. Some corporations and churches see Xers as uncommitted and lazy. On the contrary, the issue centers around a determination not to let the needs of a company, such as frequent moving or excessive hours, interfere with a person’s attempts at building community. Xers are committed first to their own well-being, not a corporation’s needs. They are committed to the kingdom of God, not the requirements of an institutional body. Correctly or incorrectly, many Xers see their predecessors’ commitments as unhealthy and often unbiblical.

The Church can provide great hope in this area. The community of faith is the body of Christ. Christians are all one community with mutual responsibilities and obligations toward each other. The Church is a love relationship between its members and the Christ it serves. The greatest contact point of evangelism may be when Generation Xers see the Church functioning as the biblical community God intended it to

be. Unfortunately, the Church often fails to function as this community, and this fact is not lost on Generation X. They see the bitterness, anger, and self-serving attitudes of some clergy and laity. So they look in other places for authentic, though unbiblical, community. Churches that live out this true biblical community will make inroads to Generation X.

## **Sexuality**

Bettijane Levine tells the story in the Los Angeles Times of a wedding night. Unfortunately, the story she tells reflects the views of many Generation Xers. The story is of a woman and her partner who had sex before marriage and then began to develop some questions on the wedding night. Levine quotes the bride, when reflecting on the night, saying, "What's left to do? I wonder if other couples that have been living together did exactly what we did, which is nothing.... We went to sleep. I still feel funny about it. Somehow it doesn't seem right" (E1). Yet premature sexual activity is common in Generation X. In addition, the nature of commitment in sex has changed from previous generations.

Sex in the 1960s and 1970s is remembered for its casual nature. Though certainly not accepted as the universal norm, Nena and George O'Neill express one sexual lifestyle:

Fidelity is redefined in open marriage as commitment to your own growth, equal commitment to your partner's growth, and a sharing of the self-discovery accomplished through such growth. It is loyalty and faithfulness to growth, to integrity of self and respect for the other, not to asexual and psychological bondage to each other.

In an open marriage, in which each partner is secure in his own identity and trusts the other, new possibilities for additional relationships exist, and open (as opposed to limited) love can expand to include others.... These outside relationships may, of course, include sex. (254-55)

Xers have a different view about sexuality. First of all, sex is not viewed optimistically. For instance, disease is rampant, though disease seems to keep few from acting on their sexual impulses. Second, sex today is much more about personal needs than about commitment. Even when sex is within a “committed relationship,” that commitment is often void of a desire for marriage. Though people are having their first sexual experiences at younger and younger ages, they are waiting longer and longer to get married, if they choose to get married at all. Third, sex is often used as a tool to gain intimacy rather than being seen as the natural overflow of a committed, intimate, marriage relationship. People are having sex more out of a desire for intimacy than as a by-product of a loving relationship (Zustiak 71). In other words, many Xers have sex in the search for intimacy instead of having sex because they already share an intimate, loving relationship. Indeed, evidently the drive toward early sexual commitment may relate more to the desire for community, than the expression of community.

Generation X’s view of sexuality goes beyond the heterosexual lifestyle. On college campuses today one cannot help but be confronted with a variety of ways to live out one’s sexuality. Everything from the gay and lesbian lifestyle to the bisexual lifestyle to a transgender sexual orientation to sadomasochism to serial monogamy is welcomed and embraced. Much of the rising tolerance of diverse sexual orientations seems to relate to the postmodern notion of truth and power. Gays and lesbians are tired of Christian morality being used against them, often in a violent and far from Christian manner. Instead of Christians helping gays, many simply condemn gays for their beliefs and practices. As meta-narratives have been dismantled by postmodern philosophy, so have the social mores that went with them, one of which was sexuality.

The good news is that the Christian community does address sexuality in a healthy manner. Sex is one of God's greatest gifts. God wants humanity to live out their God given sexuality within the ministry area of a man and a woman coming together in a marriage covenant. Indeed, he created sex that humanity might have great joy. God was intentional about sex. God knows, however, the power of sexuality and that it can only be fully realized in the ministry area of a committed marriage relationship before him. This element of community was also intentional. Within this community, a community for which Generation Xers long, that sexuality is lived out in its fullness and with greatest joy.

### **Diversity**

Postmodernism's influence on Generation X's sexuality has been important, but even more important has been postmodernism's influence on diversity. The focus on diversity has come not only from a rise in cultural awareness via technology and the media but also because of a rise of tolerance in relation to the many other worldviews so readily accessible and available. One of the ways in which postmodernism affects Generation X is that for them diversity "is not a simple issue of black and white. Diversity is more about individual choices and opportunities" (C. Miller 126). Whereas elements in previous generations attempted to construct diversity artificially, Generation Xers take diversity for granted (Schieber et al. 31).

Unlike some Generation X issues that face the Church, diversity is one which should be embraced. The Church should be the model of diversity—not of pluralism, but of the diversity of the community of believers united by their faith to such a degree that differences, while appreciated, are secondary. As Paul said, in the kingdom there exist no longer, "Jew nor Greek, male or female" (Gal. 3:28). The Church is a diverse community

who love each other and who view differences, assuming they are not in conflict with the Bible, as a great blessing.

### **Pop Culture**

Postmodernism has affected Gen X pop culture differently than in previous generations. Pop culture and youth culture were evident long before Generation X came along, but Generation X is probably the first actually to grow up on pop culture. To say that pop culture has had an effect on the larger culture would be an understatement. To Xers, pop culture is a way of life. As Beaudoin writes, “During our lifetimes, especially during the critical period of the 1980’s, pop culture was the amniotic fluid that sustained us” (Virtual Faith 21). In fact, Generation X cannot be understood apart from pop culture (22). The Church needs to understand pop culture if it wants to understand Generation X.

The dominant elements of pop culture seem to be music, television, video, film, and cyberspace, with music being most important. Elvis may have begun the music craze for Boomers, but it continued on through the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Madonna, and ‘N Sync, just to mention a few. Generation Xers were born on music, and it has been influential throughout their lives. Where music differs with Xers from previous generations is that audio and video have come together. MTV is now a force, if not *the* force, that drives teenage culture, and its impact is hard to overstate. As Bob Pittman is quoted to have said, “At MTV we don’t shoot for the 14-year-olds, we own them” (qtd. in Dawn 17). Film and television also played an increasing role as Xers grew up. Born into a world of three TV stations, options have expanded exponentially with the advent of cable and satellites so that now virtually hundreds of viewing options are available at any time of the day.



Though pop culture's influence is important, the driving influence behind both music videos and television/film is technological advancement. Indeed, Elvis was not a giant success until he appeared on television. He set the standard for how others would follow in their use of the media. This new use of the media happened because of technological advances. The advances in technology have had such an impact on the media in general that some elements of technology are now part of pop culture itself. For instance just a few years ago the computer at school was the craze. Then people began to purchase them for their homes. Soon e-mail and the Internet came along, and now the world is truly wired. Bill Gates writes that in the future office many documents will not be fully printable on paper because so much information will be embedded in the document. Three-dimensional video screens will be necessary to take in all the information. People will still be able to have a two-dimensional view, "but that will be like reading a music score instead of listening to a recording" (85). As technology advances with pop culture, technology will have an impact on the Church that probably cannot be fully imagined at present. Barna believes that by 2010, 10-20 percent of the country will receive their primary spiritual input via the Internet (Second Coming 180), and he may be right.

The point of is that postmodernism has impacted pop culture to the point that it now defines a generation. Pop culture has usurped the role of institutional religion and acted as surrogate clergy (Beaudoin, Virtual Faith 21). The vast majority of Xers looked to pop culture for guidance in life, school, sexual activity, behavior toward their elders, etc. The Church relinquished what had been its role because it refused to embrace the good of the media and technology, blinded itself to the changes that were coming, and, as a result, became irrelevant to many Xers. Though the debate is intense at times on how

faith communities should engage pop culture, some churches are clearly engaging the postmodern pop culture. They are doing so in a Christian manner that embraces the elements of pop culture that can be used for the kingdom, thereby transforming pop culture into a kingdom culture. As Clapp writes, these churches may be a sign that the Church can benefit in the long run from pop culture if only because it forces the Church to be Christian:

However much Christians despise the culture wars because certain culture warriors espouse positions some find disturbing (or even cataclysmic), the culture wars can be welcomed on the count that they help return us to a place where we can conceive of Christianity as a way of life, as a specific manner of being and doing in the world. And they make it possible for Christians, like those who inhabit other ways of life, to move more easily and directly into the public, the social, the political, and the economic realms—and to do so specifically as Christians. (75)

## **Materialism**

Another important influence of postmodernism on Generation X is its rampant materialism. Consumerism is rampant and there are no signs on the horizon of it abating. Consumption in the Gen X decades was rampant and America's consumer habits have affected the Church. A fine line exists between engaging the culture in order to transform the culture and embracing the culture to such a degree that it transforms the nature of the Church. All too often the Church has gone too far in embracing the consumer culture. Marva J. Dawn is certainly correct when she writes, "our churches are in the business of forming Christians, not catering to consumeristic choices" (195). Certainly a balance exists. The Church needs to engage persons in this consumeristic culture to a degree but most churches seem to have erred on the side of consumerism—an error Generation X has noticed.

## Heart Versus the Mind

Another important issue for Xers is the tension between the heart and the mind. One of the clear changes from the modern world to the postmodern world has been the renewed emphasis on the heart and on experience. For moderns the key phrase was, “I think; therefore, I am.” For postmoderns, the phrase is, “I feel; therefore, I am,” or possibly, “I shop; therefore, I am,” when it comes to consumption-minded busters. “The postmodern world view has intuition and emotion at its center,” write Ford and Denny, “not intellect” (128). Ford and Denny give an example to this effect. Evidently the George H. Bush White House and the Clinton White House differed only slightly, yet profoundly, in how they responded to letters sent to them. The Bush White House responded with, “Thank you for telling us what you *think* [emphasis mine],” while the Clinton White House sent the following: “Thank you for sharing your *feelings* [emphasis mine] with us” (128). This is but one example of the shift from the modern to the postmodern world.

This shift is unmistakably apparent for communicators in Western culture. Preachers and teachers have noticed changes in attention span and focus as they relate to presenting didactic arguments. People who grew up in a world of two-hour movies, three-minute music videos, thirty-second commercials, and ten-second sound bites are most often not prepared for a thirty to sixty-minute didactic monologue. Generation Xers can pay attention for long periods of times. For instance many can watch movies all day or play video games for hours. They simply are not trained to pay attention to didactic monologue as a style of communication. The media and postmodernism have trained Generation Xers to tune in to the emotions, not the intellect. Communication to Generation Xers requires engaging the heart along with, and maybe more than, the mind

(Henderson 88). This changing communication style does not mean that the Church should give up its role of helping people think consistently both theologically and intellectually. What the change does mean is that helping Generation Xers learn to think cognitively may be more effective if it takes place later in the evangelism process, or even during discipleship, as opposed to seeing intellectual acceptance as a precursor to any type of evangelism.

This dichotomy of the heart and mind gives Xers a unique capacity to be indifferent to theological and philosophical inconsistencies. Relationships, for most Xers, are more important than didactic minutia. They may see inconsistencies in their thought processes, but inconsistencies are inconsequential when compared to the relationships that may be negatively affected by how they come down on an issue. Therefore, when choosing between issues means breaking community or relationships, many Xers will choose not to make a decision because they value relationships more than truth.

This shift toward the heart is important for the Church for much of modern apologetics is based on an assumption of universal truth and the belief that individuals want to know the truth. The former is certainly not universally accepted anymore, and the latter is of secondary importance to relationships. This change in assumptions does not, however, mean the Church should give up its truth claims. It can never let go of its truth claims for in the Christian faith is true life. The Church does need to see that accepting the vital Christian truths may happen toward the end of the evangelism process as opposed to at the beginning. People must accept the basics of the Christian faith, but intellectual acceptance may not be the first step of faith, and indeed that acceptance certainly can no longer be presumed about persons not active in a church.

## The Importance of Experience

The reason the heart has taken on such importance is because of this shift toward experience. The importance of experience is another crucial aspect of Generation X. This emphasis on experience can be noticed in more than just communication and teaching styles. It can be seen in everything from virtual reality to body piercing to skydiving to suicide. Beaudoin writes, "Piercing signifies immediate, bodily, and constant attention to the intimacy of experience" ("Marks"). Bodily experience is key for Xers. The drive for experience is now taking virtual reality to the next step of trying to create experiences that seem real until one has left them. Jean Baudrillard argues that the world is one world of simulations in which media generated images function independently of any reality external to them (qtd. in O'Day 112). The real and the imaginary are now often hard to distinguish. This coming together of the real and imaginary can be seen not only in video games and movies where computer simulations are now the norm.

The dramatic rise in tattooing and extreme sports also seems to be related to the desire for intense experience. The pain of changing one's body is addicting to some while skydiving provides the rush and fear that are difficult to simulate or experience anywhere else. Xers want experience because they so often believe the world is boring and irrelevant. Again, this does not mean that the intellect is irrelevant but that it is no longer the focus of meaning. Sample provides an interesting and accurate comparison of how moderns and Generation Xers differ in their interpretation of meaning in practice. Moderns use words and phrases such as "Descriptive, explanatory, re-presentational, discourse, rational, analytical, explicit exploration, verifiable truth, knowing as a discipline and observational distance" (83). Generation Xers use different words and phrases such as, "Emotive, embodied, presentational, vernacular, non-rational,

experiential, implicit seeking, subjective truth, knowing as lived, and intimate immersion” (83). Experience is the key for Generation X. Intellect, though still important, plays a secondary role in virtually every element of life for Generation Xers. They want to experience real life and the Church has wonderful opportunities in this arena.

Dr. Donald Miller did a fascinating study of three thriving Christian movements—Calvary Chapels, Vineyards, and Hope Chapels. One of the reasons so many people have responded to these movements is because they embrace experience. Summing up these three movements Miller writes, “They offer people hope and meaning that is grounded in a transcendent experience of the sacred” (3). Later he writes, “The real staying power of new paradigm churches is that they are mediating deeply felt religious experience and doing this much more effectively than many mainline churches” (16). These three churches that Miller studied are primarily Boomer churches. Churches that are reaching Generation X in important numbers are making the experience of the sacred even more tangible and can be seen in churches like Mars Hill in Seattle and Mosaic in Los Angeles where the entire worship setting is designed to contribute to an experience of the divine. Of course, the drive for experience was also a factor in the design of medieval cathedrals and ancient liturgy. Cathedrals were built so people would experience the awe and wonder of the creator as they gathered for worship. Liturgies were often culturally indigenous tools designed to elicit an experience of the divine. The problem is that modern worship seems to copy much of those same ancient liturgies that are no longer indigenous hundreds of years later. Effective Generation X churches facilitate experiences of God that relate to the postmodern experience. As Sweet writes, “Churches in postmodern communities will be built, not around great preachers, but around great experiences” (SoulTsunami 199), while helping postmoderns, “live

experience rather than consume experience” (197). Once these churches help people relate to God from within their culture, they then move to share with Xers a fuller description of who God is and what he is like. Though this fuller account may not seem initially relevant to some Generation Xers, these divine attributes are, nevertheless, crucial to developing a more complete understanding of God and a richer experience of him.

### **The Hope Deficit**

Experience became important because of a variety of other influences that impact culture. One of the most important issues now impacting Generation X is an absence of hope. “Hopelessness,” says one writer, “is the very definition of postmodernism” (Jenson 19), and it is only magnified for Generation X. If Xers have one common, universal desire it is hope. Craig Miller asked some Generation Xers what two events had the most profound impact on their lives, and their answers included Rodney King and the LA riots, Magic Johnson’s HIV, the O.J. Trial, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the birth of MTV, the Challenger explosion, the suicide of Kurt Cobain, just to name a few (33). Clearly one thing this generation needs is hope. In fact, some believe that shame may be the only issue that looms larger on the Generation X mind-set (Long 186 ff.) The modern mind-set placed a great deal of hope in the future. Hope was one of the great benefits of the Enlightenment. For many Xers, however, as the Enlightenment, wanes so does hope.

Some argue that the lack of hope is what explains risky behavior in Generation X. People do not get tattooed or go skydiving in order to get an experience. They do these activities because they have no hope. “The combination of diminished parental supervision and a fatalistic view of the future,” writes Holtz, “led Generation Xers to engage in innovative new (risky) activities” (73). The greatest sign of the lack of hope in

Generation X, however, is the dramatic rise in suicide. Teen suicide has risen 300 percent since the 1960s (Holtz 77; Ford and Denny100), and is now the second leading cause of death for college students (“The Campus Ministry Update”). Generation X has a hope deficit and nobody is providing adequate answers except the Church.

Jonah may prove to be a great sign of hope to this generation. Jonah was one who strayed from God’s desires and will. Not only did he stray, he also went in the exact opposite direction that God desired. So many Xers believe they have done the same. They have strayed in numerous ways and cannot imagine a God who would love them. God did give Jonah a second chance. God gave Jonah hope that he could again live in God’s will. God gives Xers a second chance as well, and in this they will find hope. As Ajith Fernando writes, “The story of Jonah gives hope to anyone who realizes that he or she has moved away from God’s will” (46).

### **How the Church Can Respond**

The Church can respond in a number of ways to Xers’ needs. The first thing the Church must realize is that most Xers are not looking for answers to spiritual questions from the Church. In fact, Generation Xers look almost everywhere but the Church for the answers to their spiritual questions (Schieber et al. 67; Nash ix). Baby boomers at least returned to Church for their children even though now that their children are grown Boomers and are leaving their churches in droves. Most Xers, however, never even gave the Church a chance. Most Xers do not begin with an assumption that Christ is the starting place for religion (Barna, “Questions” G1). One pastor in Boston interviewed a large number of Generation Xers and asked them what they were looking for in a church, and their dominant response was, “Why would we look for a church in the first place?” (Bannister 21) Most do not see the Church as the place to begin the spiritual journey.



Generation X is a post-Christian generation that may be spiritually seeking, but is not looking to the Church for answers.

Numerous debates exist about whether Xers are seeking at all. Some like William Strauss and Neil Howe believe that Generation X has no spiritual yearnings; religion is irrelevant for them (13th 20, 183). Most scholars, however, seem to differ. Indeed, a wealth of religious themes are evident in pop culture though many themes are far from Christian. Beaudoin believes two main streams of religiosity flow from Generation X. First is a widespread regard for paganism, and second is a growing enchantment with mysticism (Virtual Faith 25). Kelly expands on that list to include growing exploration with Eastern, Native American, and Goddess Earth religions (170). The debate is real, but Generation X seems to be a spiritually seeking generation. The problem is that most Generation Xers are seeking in such different ways from previous generations that many long-time Christians do not even recognize Generation Xers' spiritual desires. If the Church does not learn to see their struggles, it probably will not see the divergent spiritual searchings in the generation to follow (McAllister 7-8).

The Church can respond a variety of ways in including, but not limited, to the following:

Provide love and care,

Be authentic and transparent as leaders,

Trust them in leadership and on their spiritual journeys,

Serve humbly, and

Use media to engage the heart and mind (Beaudoin, Virtual Faith 161; Ford and Denny 188; Tapia 22; Schieber et al.14).

The Church must offer Jesus, but Jesus is only truly shared in loving relationships. As James Hampton writes, “The clear articulation of truth is not powerful enough to convince the average person.... Something more is generally needed, and that is love.” Long writes that above all the Church must choose to engage the Generation X culture with the message of the gospel:

We have a critical decision ahead of us. We can either take the assimilating road and ultimately be assimilated by the culture or we can take the road of protection and thus become irrelevant to the culture. We can choose the unchanging road and face cultural extinction. We can take the battling road and face being annihilated by the culture or winning the cultural war but losing the battle for the souls of people in the culture. Or we can take the road of influence being prophetic in the culture and providing hope for Generation X and the coming Postmodern generations. (34)

### **Never-churched and Urban Anglo Ministry**

Coupland writes, “You are the first generations raised without religion,” (Life 169) when he speaks of Generation X. This was shown quite specifically in one of Jay Leno’s classic episodes, in which he interviews people on the streets of Los Angeles and asks them some basic questions about the Bible. Their answers are stunning in their ignorance. “Can you name one of the Ten Commandments?” asks Leno of two college-age women. One replies, “Freedom of speech?” The other woman is then asked to complete the following sentence: “Let he who is without sin....” “Have a good time?” she responds. These are only two of the examples from the show (qtd. in Sweet, SoulTsunami 60). Clearly some people gave the correct answers, and they were edited out, but the reality of those shown was not lost on Leno’s audience and should not be lost on the Church. Los Angeles is not alone.

As this dissertation sought to study the never churched a determination must be made as to where most of the never churched reside. Because of the decline of urban

churches all over the country, along with the postmodern influences on the urban landscape, most never churched persons inhabit cities. While the suburbs and rural areas seem to still have a relatively strong church presence, urban areas are in many places a theological wasteland at least in Anglo-American communities. The African-American church still wields some authority in their communities although it, too, seems on the decline. On the whole, churches have lost much authority in urban areas.

### **Never-churched Persons**

Today Western culture is in a ministry area where people are not only unchurched, but many Generation Xers have never been “in a church and are without the most basic information about Christianity” (Schieber et al. 13). They have never been to church; they never owned a Bible; and, they have no interest in, or sense a need for, religion (Anderson 134). Many have no Christian memory to which churches can try to appeal (J. White 4).

Some may question these statements pointing out that attendance around the country has remained relatively stable in recent years. In addition, many people attending church say they are new to the faith. George Barna writes, however, that when questioned in depth, the reality is they grew up in a church and left or had some sort of Christian background before attending the current church (qtd. in Sweet, SoulTsunami 46). Indeed, these are not new converts from a never churched background but rather semi-churched people who are reclaiming something they once knew (Gibbs 177).

Some people have also argued that what is happening in Generation X is the same phenomena that happened to Boomers. Most Boomers grew up in church and then left in the high school or college years while returning when they began having children. This theory, however, does not take into account three realities. First, studies are now showing

that the Boomers who came to church for their children are now leaving the Church in droves once their children graduate from high school. Second, even though Boomers have been affected by postmodernism, they did not grow up in it like Xers did. postmodernism is dominant for Xers. Third, though some Boomers returned to church for their children many did not, so the percentage of children of Boomers who grew up in the faith is much less than the percentage of Boomers who themselves grew up in the Church. Andrea Lee Schieber et al. describe the errant belief that Xers will return to the Church on their own:

Many church members think that young adults are missing [from church] because we have not settled down with a job, spouse, and family. They still believe that Xers will come to church when we have children. We don't. Many of us were not brought up with a strong religious connection. We may want our kids to have morals and values consistent with the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule, but we find other ways of providing these. (35)

Generation Xers are not automatically coming back to church. The Church must go find them, and the place where most never churched Xers seem to live is in the city.

### **Urban Anglo Ministry**

Many important phenomena presently exist in American cities today. Two have a direct impact on this study. The first has to do with the return of Anglo-Americans to urban centers while the second has to do with the remarkable growth of cities in general.

Though this research is not limited to Anglos, they are the largest ethnic background participating in the study and the rising urban Anglo population is important to this study and the cultural changes taking place. The 1960s through the 1980s were a time of "white flight" for much of the urban culture. Wealthy and middle-class Anglo-Americans fled urban centers to the perceived safety of the suburbs. Though many churches followed their parishioners to the suburbs, many did not. By 1979, for instance,

Presbyterians were abandoning two urban churches for every one planted in the suburbs (Dudley 78). New churches in the suburbs were applauded, but their growth did not match the decline in the urban core. Today, however, many children of those who fled are now returning to the urban centers. For instance, my place of ministry, downtown Orlando, Florida, is projected to grow tremendously in the next decade. Unfortunately, many churches are not changing their focus in order to address the needs and concerns of this young Anglo population. Interestingly, many churches failed to meet the needs and concerns of the African-American community in the past decades, and they suffered because of it. Many of these same churches are suffering today because they did not learn from the mistakes of the past regarding engaging new populations. Most of the time the issues and needs of returning Xers are very different from both African-Americans and previous Anglo populations. Churches that fail to recognize their changing ministry areas are being punished with dwindling congregations.

Another difficult element of urban ministry is that, though urban populations are growing, the mainline denominations are not planting urban churches in significant numbers except those that focus on non-Anglo communities. Amazingly, the Anglican Church in the eighteenth-century England made the same mistake. This failure was one of the reasons that led to the secularization of English cities, as well as the rise of Methodism in urban areas (Hunter, How to Reach 82). A primary reason for this failure to plant new works in urban areas is a fear of hindering the few remaining Anglo churches even though the vast majority of them are mostly ineffective (Bakke, “Challenge” 85). Yet to effectively evangelize new inhabitants, new church plants are exactly what are needed in these new communities (Conn, Planting; Schaller, Center City 172).

The rise in population in many urban communities is even more dramatic around the world. According to Raymond J. Bakke, in 1900 only about 8 percent of the world's population lived in cities. Today, however, more than 50 percent of the world's six billion people live in cities ("New Urban Geography" par. 18). William Beckman did a fascinating study looking at the dramatic urbanization of the past century and postulating potential growth through 2025. Cities of one million-plus will grow from twenty in 1900 to 652 in 2025 (54). Cities of four million-plus, of which only one existed in 1870, are estimated to be up to 144 in 2025 (54). Giant cities of ten million-plus, he thinks, may grow from one in 1935 to eighty in 2050 (54).

Though many of these enormous cities are not in the West, and though urbanization is not as dramatic in the West, urbanization is still an important issue for the Church in the West. In the United States, most growth is taking place in midsize urban centers. Though the fifteen largest United States cities have lost four million people since 1965 (Bakke, "New Urban Geography" par. 19), the return of Anglo populations to urban cores is striking. Many of these Anglo-Americans are Xers seeking to find their place in the world. As they grow in numbers, they also grow in importance to the Church as a community to evangelize. Andy Crouch details the importance of urban evangelism:

The city is full of ... humanity in all its glory and fallenness. As human history progresses cities depend more and more completely on human culture for their meaning.... So, the reason to privilege the city comes down, for Christians, to the fact that it concentrates God-bearers to an unprecedented (and sometimes nearly intolerable) degree. As Mary Lee Murphy says of New Orleans, it is "a lovely mess." The heavens declare the glory of God, true, and the firmament declares his handiwork. The city mostly shows us one another. Depending on how you look at it, that's either almost hell or almost heaven.

The Church's mission is to make cities "almost heaven," beginning with indigenous evangelism.

## **Evangelism**

Aubrey Malphurs writes, “If top priority is not given to effective evangelism by our churches, in two generations the Church in America will look much like its counterpart in Europe” (193). The pressing need for evangelism was just discussed. Now this research turns to issues of how evangelism may be changing and how postmoderns are presently being converted.

### **Baby Boomers: Worship as Evangelism**

During the early part of the twentieth century through the 1950s, many Christians thought conversion and discipleship took place in the Sunday school class. Great churches were built on Sunday school classes, and they became the defining element of many individual churches and denominations. In the 1960s, however, a shift occurred that lasted through much of the 1990s. Boomers who had grown up in church began returning to worship. They were attracted to the idea of church in general even though they may not have attended for years. They had a positive outlook on church and good childhood memories. So when they thought about growing spiritually and assisting the moral development of their children, the first place to which they turned was the Church. With this background, the worship service became the primary point of evangelism for adults. Worship was the emphasis. Though other elements of church life were important, worship was the element that drew people to church most of the time, and worship was the ministry area in which most evangelism occurred. Advertisements for churches in newspapers and the Yellow Pages frequently included the pastor’s name, the time of worship services, the presence of childcare, and possibly the title of the Sunday message. The focus was the worship service.

Willow Creek Community Church is the primary example of this. Although Willow Creek strongly encourages individuals to share their personal witness and invite people into a life of faith in Christ, the entire philosophy and life of the Church revolves around the weekend “seeker” evangelistic services, which are designed so that believers can invite their unbelieving friends to church where they can hear the gospel. This model worked very well when the majority of the culture was willing to come to worship, even though they were not believers, because they had a positive view of the Church and looked to the Church as the starting point for religious faith. (Interestingly, Willow Creek is beginning to question its assumptions and is in the preliminary stages of making changes in its focus and format.) As times change, the methods of communicating the never-changing gospel need to change according to language, culture, and background of the people (J. White 30).

As discussed above, for Generation Xers the Church is no longer the starting point for a religious journey. They do not have a positive view of the Church, and they do not, as a general rule, believe that the Church will help them in their spiritual journey. Worship is apparently no longer the dominant ministry area for evangelism.

### **Changes in Evangelistic Styles**

Some argue that effective evangelism takes place in much different ways than in the past. Malphurs believes most evangelism takes place in ministry areas, and with methods, that do not fit the present culture primarily because the Church does not understand the culture (195). James Emery White asks, “Are the conditions and attitudes that created such a successful ministry area for those strategies [evangelistic strategies from the 1960s] still in place today? The answer is ‘No’” (41). The old apologetic is not as effective today, if it is effective at all, and the Church needs to reimagine how it shares



the Good News of Christ (Guder et al. 110; McLaren 72). The Church must act like a missionary institution once again if it wants to reach this culture. It needs to see itself almost as if it is going to a different country and culture. It must live among the people, learn their language, build relationships, and find redemptive analogies so the Christian message can be communicated effectively (Celek and Zander 99). When the Church effectively evangelizes, it will reach Generation X with the gospel.

### **Ministry Areas for Evangelism**

Patrick Mays did some interesting work in his dissertation on Generation X evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary. He details six elements of Generation X evangelism: relationships, community, service, narrative evangelism, cross-cultural engagement, and the importance of seeing evangelism as a process (246 ff.). All of these are important, but Mays does not detail which is most important in general and which, if any, is most important to never churchd persons.

Five basic ministry areas for evangelism dominate the literature, though some scholars and pastors differ about which they emphasize. They include worship, small groups, one-on-one witnessing, service, and narrative evangelism. Realizing no one single point of entry into the faith or into community exists, the purpose of this study was to discover if one ministry area is most effective for evangelizing urban, Protestant, Generation Xers.

I chose the word “ministry area” because it seems most descriptive of what I studied. Often different methods of evangelism are prevalent within each of these arenas for evangelism. Different types of small groups are prevalent, for instance, and different methods for one-on-one evangelism and different styles of worship. Though I sought to discern if some of these methods are most important through the questionnaire, my goal

was to discover the ministry areas or arenas in which evangelism is most effective, not the particular methods within each ministry area. Therefore, I turn to the five dominant ministry areas for evangelism.

**One-on-one evangelism.** Some churches made their mark and grew tremendously using cold-call evangelism. Sometimes this style of evangelism involved going to the homes of people they did not know and inviting them to faith in Christ after a short introduction. Other times it involved walking up to people on the street, handing out tracts on the faith, or asking people on the spot to discuss their personal faith.

Each of these methods was effective in some instances. Most individuals knew the basics of the faith though they had not committed to following Christ for a variety of reasons. Though many were turned off by this technique and ministry area for evangelism, countless millions were brought into the faith through it.

The same is true for the Billy Graham crusades and other similar evangelistic campaigns. Communities gathered for a one day, or multiday, crusade put on by a well-known evangelist who would give the general message of the gospel and then ask people to commit their lives to Christ. This style worked very well in its time, especially in ministry areas where people were familiar with the gospel story and knew the basic doctrine and accepted its basic assumptions and prescriptions. In both these examples of witnessing, personal and corporate, a person who had no previous knowledge of an individual could make truth claims in an impersonal ministry area and then ask the individual to respond. This style was very effective at one point in American culture when American culture was familiar with the Christian story. This study sought to discover which style was still effective.

For the most part, one-on-one evangelism does not seem to be highly effective anymore. Christians are called to tell their experience and understanding of the Christian story, but this process of telling the story takes a longer time than a ten-minute explanation on the street. When Christians share their story and invite people into a joyful new culture of Christian community with people they know, an opportunity for response is created (Strauss and Howe, Fourth Turning 166). They will often embrace their friend's story, which is discussed later in this study, even though they do not necessarily believe in the biblical story (Schieber et al. 13). When no personal relationship exists, however, most never churchd persons will not accept a story that conflicts with their own experience.

Great debate also exists about the future of large evangelistic outreach events for the never churchd. Though some still advocate large group events, they tend to be most effective in communities where the majority of people are active in churches, most notably in the south (Rainer 32). The only other case in which they seem to be effective is as a first stage of evangelism, say in athletic events, as opposed to venues that only include preaching and an opportunity to make a decision for Christ (D. Miller 172). Most observers, however, do not advocate crusades or other large evangelistic events if the goal is to reach the never churchd (Anderson 127). The reason many are turning from this model is because it is based on four assumptions that no longer seem to be valid. The first invalid assumption is that the never churchd are looking for religion from Christians and have a positive view of the Church. Second, never churchd persons have an understanding of what is involved in commitment. Third, never churchd persons have positive thoughts and feelings about evangelists in general and superstar evangelists in particular. Fourth, and finally, personal relationships are secondary to the truth of Christ

in the process of conversion (Rainer 29). None of these assumptions can be taken for granted today.

**Narrative evangelism.** Narrative evangelism is similar to personal witnessing, but it differs in focus. In narrative evangelism the goal is not to get someone to assent to a set of beliefs or a formula for life from the outset but rather to help people see that the stories of their lives go hand-in-hand with the story of God's action in the universe. Orthodox belief is a crucial element of narrative evangelism, but it is made clear only after persons come to see their stories as part of God's story:

Narrative evangelism merges "our story" with "God's story" by sharing it with others.... The goal of narrative evangelism is ... to help the person or people you are talking with adapt their life's story to be more in line with God's story. The story that the Christian community adopts is Jesus' story-Jesus' life. Thus to become a Christian (to convert) is to adopt the story of Christ so that we become part of the story line. (Long 188-89)

Conversion takes place when the collision of the divine and individual stories forces individuals to question their own stories and respond in faith (Ford 14). Graeme

Codrington gives a good definition of narrative evangelism:

The telling of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the form of a story.... Narrative evangelism involves more than simply telling a story, but also involves telling your own personal life-story. This is told by the way you live, in an authentic manner, as well as by means of testimony.

Clapp offers three crucial elements to effective narrative evangelism, which he calls "faith narratives" (182). First, narrative evangelism is much more effective when shared in an ongoing relationship. Second, a person's narrative benefits when it makes an effort to encompass as many life experiences as possible. For example, he points out the difficulties the Christian Science movement has had making inroads simply because so many people get sick, which seems to contradict their theology and interpretation of life. Finally, narratives are more persuasive when they are told by people who are perceived

as honest and who tell the whole story of a faith, both the good and the bad, such as when a Christian adequately addresses the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Effective narratives are, therefore, not defensive but compassionate. Narrative evangelism does not mean other faiths are accepted in a pluralistic manner but that dialogue can take place in a healthy, rather than defensive, manner (183-84). Narrative evangelism seems to be an important concept on the postmodern and never churchd horizons.

**Small groups.** Schaeffer writes, “We may preach truth. We may preach orthodoxy. We may even stand against the practices of untruth strongly. But if others cannot see something beautiful in our human relationships ... then we are not living properly” (41). The never-churched world is longing for healthy relationships. Most never-churched people know they need personal relationships. What many do not know is that they also need a personal relationship with God. Evangelism within small groups may be the most promising ministry area for evangelism in this postmodern culture. I have already discussed in this study the importance of community to Generation Xers. They long for community, yet so few of them have any sort of significant community much less a biblical community. Unfortunately, much to their detriment, the vast majority of churches no longer provide biblical community (Mead 45). If the Church, however, does not provide avenues for biblical community, nobody else will. Biblical community must be taught, and only the Church can do it.

Humans are not born with knowledge of how to live the Christian life. People cannot learn how to be a community of faith on our own. Christians need mentors, teachers, and partners who will help, challenge, and urge them into deeper and deeper biblical community (Guder et al. 155). Teaching and modeling this community is important for churches that seek to evangelize the never churchd. An article from

Changing Church Perspective describes the importance of teaching how to be a community of faith:

Community is central to the Twenty-First century church. Today, we are a culture of fractured families and changing social structures. We are time-starved and isolated by distance, work, individualistic pursuits, and even our neighborhoods. Yet we are created for community. Community in the Church of the future is more than just making relationships or being in a small group. It is an expression of the gospel. It is both hermeneutic and apologetic. The Church has nothing to show other than the exhibit of how we live in community with Christ at the center. Community is not an extra or bonus. It is the essence of what Christians have to offer. (“Church, New Edge”)

Small groups are the building blocks of the Church, and they will become even more important in this new millennium.

Nothing magical, however, exists in small groups. One aspect that makes small groups so effective is that, at their best, they are hyper-relational. This focus on relationships is so important to both the gospel and Generation X. Another important aspect is that small groups convey both demands and grace to members. John Wesley knew the importance of small groups. He knew the small community was a place where people could be encouraged in addition to being held accountable to life in Christ. Wesley knew the heart of small group ministry was not in the private experience of God but in the communal experience of the divine (Long 142; Banks 36). Wesley also knew, however, that small groups helped people outside the Church explore their intimate connections with God in an unpressured, yet highly motivating, ministry area (Bandy 183). Wesley also seemed to know that some people would belong to the community before they would commit to Christ. Wesley did not invent this. He learned it from Jesus and the twelve disciples. Biblical community has been important to every period of the

Church and still is today. Indeed, biblical community just may be the Church's gift to the postmodern world (Dawn 55).

Carl F. George is one of the world's small group gurus, and he knows that the strength of small groups, like all effective ministry, is relationally based (Coming Church Revolution 63). He writes in Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership of three crucial elements to all biblical small groups, provide nurturing relationships in the presence of Jesus Christ; inviting people to faith in Christ; and reproduce leaders (1). Three elements are crucial to nurturing relationships. First, trust must reign supreme in the group (Gorman 99). As Francis Fukuyama writes, "Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior based on commonly shared norms" (26). Second, relationships are nurtured when pastoral care takes place within the small group. In the postmodern world, pastoral care may be most effective when done by laypeople instead of clergy. Correspondingly, lay pastoral care is most profitable in the small group ministry area in which people have strong relationships (Galloway 9; Neighbor 23). Third, and related to the previous two, is love. No group will be Christian over the long haul if love does not develop between the group members. Love is a crucial element evident in any long-standing group, in any part of the country (Hunter, Church 94).

As Sweet writes in SoulTsunami, "Postmodern evangelism can ... be summarized in one word: relationships" (195). People who have been part of biblical small groups for any length of time know they are a very effective method of evangelism, not only for the previously churchd but also for the never churchd. Biblical community, like biblical worship, draws people into the life of faith. Both worship and small groups, in and of themselves, can draw people toward Christ. Many have noticed the way evangelism

naturally happens in community (George, Prepare Your Church 41; Stewart and Bennett 194; Stockstill 52; Higginbotham 2). The key is that evangelism happens in relationship. As Darrell L. Guder et al. write, evangelism in small groups is “an invitation of companionship” (97), and companionship is for which something postmoderns desire.

Because this yearning for relationships is so important to Generation X and postmoderns, churches do need to be careful of at least one thing. Sometimes relationships can become so tight that community is not biblical but dependent and humanistic (Long 149). Community with other humans is important, but it is not the final goal of biblical community. The final goal of biblical community is deep relationships with neighbors along with a deep relationship with God. This focus on the human side, to the neglect of the relational element with God, is something that can be avoided with good leadership, but this potential for a humanistic focus is something of which leaders of postmodern groups need to be aware.

On the whole small groups are very important to ministry in postmodern culture. Long writes, “If I am correct in tying the rapid growth of the small group movement to the transition into postmodernism, then the need for small groups among Generation X and the emerging postmodern generations will constitute a major priority in ministry” (138). Small groups are one of the most effective methodologies for evangelism today.

**Service projects.** Another ministry area in which the never churchd are being evangelized is through service opportunities. People who know very little about the Church do expect one thing—the Church will serve the community. Evangelism through service is taking place in two important ways. The first is when nonbelievers serve and through their service are converted. The second is when Christians serve nonbelievers.



These acts of service sometimes contribute to the process of conversion. I begin with the first.

Many people who do not believe in God do believe in people and want to serve those around them. Because the never churchd believe service is a purpose of the Church, they expect to see it happening and will even help make it happen. As they serve alongside healthy, loving believers, many never churchd persons are coming to faith (Rainer 135; Conn, “City” 92). Serving gets at the pragmatism that postmoderns desire.

Service can take place around the world or around the corner, and postmoderns will do both. Churches that seem, however, to reach never-churchd, postmodern persons focus on local outreach and service (Edington 18). Never-churchd persons care about people around the world, but they do not tend to share Boomer’s naiveté in their ability to change the world. They want to see tangible change, and that takes place more often at local levels (Ford and Denny 83).

The second way in which people are being evangelized through service is when Christians serve the never churchd. Probably the best example of a church that focuses its entire ministry around serving unchurched is Cincinnati Vineyard Church led by senior pastor Steve Sjogren. Their philosophy of ministry is to “demonstrate the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached” (17). They believe service is a powerful form of outreach to the never churchd for a variety of reasons. First, they serve multiple times, not just once. They try to go to areas or homes on multiple occasions, so people see that their service is a lifestyle. Second, they know that anyone can do acts of kindness. Serving does not require a special spiritual gift because everyone can do something. Third, they know that experiencing a stranger’s love can open people’s ears to God’s love (24). Serving is powerful and effective, and it draws

never churching persons into the life of faith. When they see the Church serving as they themselves serve, the never churching see the Church as a more legitimate institution. Some then take the next step of actually exploring the Church's message in depth. Serving can be one of the most powerful ministry areas for evangelism today.

**Worship.** If one ministry area for evangelism, dominates Boomer evangelism, it was worship. Worship was dominant not just for the Willow Creek seeker-style churches but also for most churches that grew strong and large predominantly with Boomers. Worship was the focus of every week, and worship was the primary event to which most church members invited their unchurched friends. Though in most cases other doors to the community, the largest one was worship. Again, this worked well in a culture where even the unchurched had a generally positive view of the institutional church.

The key element for effective worship seems to be its indigenous nature. Indigenous biblical worship still attracts people to the Christian life (Webber, Liturgical Evangelism 2). When churches take time to understand their communities and then design worship in such a way that it engages them, the never churching have a greater opportunity to engage the gospel. Worship is the focus. Evangelism is not the goal though it may be a by-product (Gibbs 179). When followers of Christ worship him indigenously in spirit and in truth, the never churching will see something real behind worship (Warren 241; Morgenthaler 38). As Paul Basden writes, "If we truly present our lives to God as a sacrifice of love right before their [seekers'] eyes, there is a good chance that they will turn to the Lord whose power and love they will feel" (30). People always have responded, and always will, to true worship.

Though many differences exist between Boomer worship and never churching worship, at least two important elements of worship are similar. First, the ministry area

for worship is one of love and acceptance in which people feel welcome (Warren 210). Without this warmth and caring, the never churched tune out before they even sit down. Second, both tell God's story. Although telling God's story looks very different in postmodern worship than it does in most Boomer worship, they both seek to tell God's story. Neither one shies away from the one true meta-narrative (Webber, Ancient-Future Faith 94-95). Rather, according to Robert H. Nash, Jr., worship focuses on retelling God story:

Worship is centered in the retelling of the Story in such a way that the worshippers find themselves inside the Story even as they worship. Modern worshipers sat on the outside looking into the story. They analyzed the story and its characters, its plot, its plausibility. Worshipers want to sit inside the story itself. They want to embrace it and live it. (70)

All true worship tells God's story, and Boomer and Xer worship is no exception. The only thing that changes from microclimate to microclimate and generation to generation is how the story is told.

Unfortunately, the arguments rage today over the question of how the Church tells God's story in worship. This struggle is commonly referred to as the worship wars between contemporary and traditionalists. Though a tension exists in the literature between those who advocate strict traditional or strict contemporary worship, biblical churches are all similar in that they worship God. postmodern worshipers are not looking for a do-it-yourself designer religion as The New York Times Magazine and others would have the Church believe ("God Decentralized"). Rather, effective postmodern worship that reaches never churched persons recognizes the traditions that must be kept in the Church while letting go of those temporal traditions relevant only to a specific community at a specific time. As Malphurs argues, Christians are to "distinguish between

that which is truly Biblical and eternal, and that which is temporal and subject to change” (159).

The Church is not, as some would argue (e.g., Leith 25), in danger of forgetting not only the Christian story but also that of Western civilization because of the changes in worship. Effective postmodern churches incorporate the important elements of Christian heritage into corporate worship. Though some churches seem quick to cast off some important elements of our tradition, they should not be viewed as the universal norm. The Christian story is still being told but in a different manner and with different tools.

Jackson Carroll writes that Western culture is in a “post traditional” or “detraditional” period (10), but this shift from the traditional is not because of a disdain for it. Rather, this shift is an effort to discover new traditions that express the same eternal realities articulated in previous traditions but is meaningful for current generations. The search is for new wineskins that express the hearts and souls of postmoderns (Slaughter, Spiritual Entrepreneurs 58). The Church needs new wine skins because Sweet’s critique below describes too many churches:

To say that the Church’s worship has become as dull and lifeless as a museum would be an insult to museums—which express postmodern culture architecturally in ways the cathedral and skyscraper expressed medieval and modern cultures respectively.... In short, the Church wouldn’t even make a good museum any more. Museums are more fun. (FaithQuakes 45)

Postmoderns desire ritual and tradition as much as Boomers and the generations before them, but they want the ritual and traditions to mean something to them. They desire a ritual that transmits a culture to their own community not ones effective for other communities or generations (Roberts 94). These traditions and rituals communicate to postmoderns when they are indigenous to the local microclimate. When worship is

indigenous, “it swells from the waters in which it is brought to life. Indigenous worship is incarnation, not imitation or replication. It is ministry by embodiment, not ministry by mimicry” (Sweet, SoulTsunami 391).

Indigenous worship does not mean that the timeless elements of the Christian faith such as baptism and communion are cast off; rather, they often become powerful means of grace. The difference between how they are incorporated into the life of never-churched persons and previously churched persons is that these elements are given full meaning in the process of discipleship. Never-churched persons are not expected to understand fully what is happening when they watch a baptism or observe communion. They do come to learn, however, the deep meaning of these acts as they are incorporated into the Church. These acts become indigenous as people participate in the community of faith because they are essential, timeless elements of the faith, not cultural expressions of a temporal reality. In my observation, these acts of worship are often much more profound for never-churched persons than for long-time Christians because the never-churched persons recognize the power, awe, and symbolism of the acts for the first time.

Biblically indigenous worship contains a number of important elements. First the music, which is usually the greatest point of contention, must match the microclimate. Indigenous music may be the dominant reason why some churches for the never churched are small and some are large; some music reaches a large microclimate while other forms of music are popular only to a small number of people. The Church needs to recognize that new music styles and different instruments will also be important to different microclimates. Second, the time of worship is important, because it is not unusual for postmodern worship to take place at times other than Sunday morning because many postmoderns are out late on Saturday night and want to sleep in the next

day (Campolo 40). Third, the arts used in worship must be indigenous. This is an important element of postmodern worship that is lost on many who view worship as a static phenomenon. The use of arts goes beyond music, dance, and drama to painting, photography, sculpture, and computer graphics that often take place during the worship service itself. Fourth, technology must be culturally relevant. As Beaudoin writes, “Contemporary technology does not happily marry with outdated ministry” (Virtual Faith 163). The opposite is also true. If the technology is not up to date, the ministry is behind the times.

Fifth, postmodern worship for the never churchd is interactive. It must be interactive because boredom is the death knell for anyone trying to reach postmoderns. They do not have to be entertained, but they will not stand for boredom. Everything else in life is interactive for postmoderns, and worship needs to be as well. Effective postmodern churches know interaction takes place both with other people and with God (Sample 50; Schaller, 21 Bridges 82). Effective churches know that technology facilitates deep and sustained worship of God for many postmoderns. Some do not agree. Susan J. White argues that technology hinders all people as they seek to worship of the living God (119). Though technology hinders some people’s worship, most postmoderns seem to benefit from technology in worship.

Using multiple senses also helps interaction. The power of incorporating all the senses is one reason why incense is popular at postmodern worship as it draws on a sense that is rarely used in worship. All aspects of worship need to draw on as many senses as possible in order for postmoderns to experience God (Driscoll).

Sixth, churches that reach never churchd persons are thoroughly authentic (Webber, “What’s Next”). Leadership puts on no airs, and it is not the thrust toward

perfection advocated by Boomer-seeker churches because perfection seems artificial to the never churchied (Celek and Zander 111; Barna, Second Coming 186). Most postmodern Christians do not seem to believe perfection is attainable in this life. Postmoderns know their lives are deeply flawed, and they expect worship to reflect this reality.

When all these elements of postmodern worship are put in place, the never churchied are engaged by the story of God portrayed in the worship experience. They may not believe the story immediately, and some may never believe. Many will believe, and their lives will be transformed. These indigenous elements engage the postmodern heart and mind and provide an opportunity for the gospel to touch the soul.

This study would be missing something if it did not touch on postmodern preaching with the never churchied in mind. Preaching has indeed changed in churches that are engaging the never churchied mind. Modern preaching was based on Enlightenment thinking which taught that it was the goal of the scholar to persuade with didactic and intellectually focused arguments (Keck 107; Hahn and Verhaagen 24). Again, modern styles of preaching worked well when people understood and knew the biblical story and could see it in their minds. When people do not know the Word, however, this style of preaching becomes, for the most part, meaningless. As Tom Wright believes, “The Word became flesh, and the Church turned flesh back into words” (qtd. in Kelly 95). Postmodern preachers are allowing the Word to come back to life. They teach, but they teach the story of the Word, not just the details of the Word. They focus on the heart and mind, not simply the cerebral realities, true as they are (Slaughter, Out on the Edge 69). Teaching still takes place. In fact, often more teaching is involved in postmodern churches than in traditional preaching in modern churches. The difference is

effective preachers to the never churchd not only tell people what they should believe and how they should act, but why. Effective teaching for the never churchd is a teaching of the story of the Word rather than the didactic formulas sometimes drawn from the Word.

These five elements of worship, small groups, service, narrative evangelism, and witnessing are the primary ministry areas in which evangelism takes place. Each is important, and each still has a place in the process of evangelism.

## **Conclusion**

The theology surrounding Jonah's journey to Nineveh provides a framework for the Church that desires to evangelize the never churchd. The never churchd population in the West continues to grow, and the churches of the future that desire to thrive must discover how to reach out to them effectively. To reach the never churchd today, one needs to understand the basic elements of postmodernism. As for Xers, the Church needs to understand how postmodernism has specifically affected them.

A few key principles for reaching Generation Xers do come immediately to mind, both from personal experience and the literature review. First, somehow the process of intellectual conversion needs to be rooted in practical experience. For Generation Xers the great question is not always, "Is something true?" but rather, "Does something matter?" For something to matter to most Generation Xers, it needs to be relevant and experiential. The Church needs to see conversion as both a turning to the intellectual truth and an experience of the divine. Second, the communal element of conversion needs to be stressed. Conversion to the Christian faith has both a corporate and personal nature. When people convert they are converted into the community of the body of Christ. This



conversion into a community is a great strength of the Christian faith for postmoderns and Generation Xers, and it needs to be stressed by churches.

Third, for evangelism to be effective in our postmodern climate, it must be contextual to the microclimate culture. Generic, one size fits all forms of evangelism are probably on their way out of North America. The final key principle for engaging the postmodern heart and mind with the gospel is offering hope. The gospel is the hope of the world and hope is a tremendous desire of postmoderns. Nevertheless, sometimes the Church glosses over this element of its faith. All of these principles are crucial to reaching the postmodern mind with the gospel

### **Literature on the Research Method**

No type of research is perfect, but considering the type of data I collected the single research method of a questionnaire is valid (Allen 17). Since mine was a descriptive study of a large population that has been delimited to provide some heterogeneity the questionnaire is suitable (Hyman 69). I have made an effort to overcome the two dominant concerns of descriptive survey studies as outlined by Hyman:

1. Proper conceptualization of the phenomenon, and
2. Adequate knowledge of the relevant population (68-71).

The phenomenon is described Chapter 1, and the relevant population has been adequately delimited.

I developed a short questionnaire that covers a few topics. First are the basic demographical questions followed by a question that determined the level of church involvement before the person's present church. Five questions to determine a person's degree of postmodernism. Following them are a series of questions to find out how much a person is really growing as a disciple of Jesus. Finally, the survey asked ten questions

surrounding the ministry area for evangelism. The possible responses to each question incorporates a Likert response scale: “Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither/No opinion, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree” (Wiersma 171).

The close-ended agree/disagree type of questionnaire is not perfect and indeed has some drawbacks as noted by Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser (229). Most notable is the element of acquiescence that has been found by some with these types of questionnaires; therefore the tool is short in order to alleviate some of this problem. After the questionnaire was developed and approved, I timed myself and pretested it (True 248). At that pretest I sought feedback on question sequence, length of time, and clarity of survey and individual questions. Necessary changes were made, and I began the data-collection process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

With the literature review in mind, the purpose of this study was to discover if one of the five ministry areas for evangelism is most effective in reaching never-churched persons. The study compares ideas presented in the literature with data collected from never churched persons. In order to facilitate the data gathering process, this study narrows the population of never churched persons to Protestant, Generation X, urban persons in a variety of locales, who converted to the Christian faith within the past five years. This focus was chosen for three reasons. First, it helped to narrow the population. Second, never-churched persons seem to be concentrated in urban areas more than in the suburbs. Third, a variety of locales, denominations, and churches were chosen in order to try to deal with the reality that the ministry area for evangelism will certainly be colored by the church's own evangelism emphasis. Without asking the question, "What ministry area does your church emphasize?" generalizations can be made on the most effective environment. This study sought to discover if one ministry area for evangelism was most effective in reaching the emerging, never-churched populations.

#### **Research Questions**

Three primary questions rise out of the discussion of the literature.

##### **Research Question 1**

Does the ministry area for effective evangelism differ between the ten never-churched persons and ten previously churched persons in each of the ten churches included in this study?

The goal of the study was to see if one ministry area for evangelism is most effective for reaching the never churched. In order to discover any differences between

the previously churched and the never churched, both groups from each church need to be studied. The reason for this differentiation is that some churches may so stress one ministry area that in reality all who come to faith come through that one specific ministry area. For instance, a church may be so focused on worship that all people who are converted, no matter what their background, end up converting through the worship service. Therefore the research sought to discover if one specific ministry area is important for a single church in both never-churched and previously churched populations, or if the ministry area differs in the two groups. Both groups received the same questionnaire and are analyzed on the same criteria.

### **Research Question 2**

In general, which of the five ministry areas for evangelism (worship, small groups, service projects, one-on-one witnessing, or narrative evangelism) is most effective in reaching never-churched, Protestant, urban Generation Xers?

The second question sought to discover if a generalization can be made about the most effective ministry area for evangelism in the population group of never-churched persons. The questionnaire measures the five ministry areas in which evangelism takes place in each church. Though this list of possible ministry areas may not be exhaustive, it covers the dominant ministry areas noted in the literature. My main goal was to discover whether any ministry area is common among all the churches in the study. If so, then some generalizations may be able to be made in regards to how to reach this population around the country.

### **Research Question 3**

Given the dynamics of postmodernism, why is the leading ministry area so effective in the process of evangelism?

Postmodernism has had a dramatic effect on Western culture. The cultural assumptions of modernism are dissolving, resulting in dramatic changes in Western society's religious landscape. The questionnaire sought to discover if one or two ministry areas for evangelism is/are most important to the population studied, the degree to which persons are being disciplined, and the degree to which an individual has been affected by postmodern thought. From that data I analyzed the findings and discussed how they relate to postmodern culture and why it is the most effective ministry area.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was a random sample of 342 individuals from eleven churches in urban centers around the United States. These churches were identified through word or mouth, or were identified in the literature as being very evangelistic. Individuals participating in the study are urban, Generation X, Protestants, ten from each church who come out of a never-churched background and ten who were previously churched. All were converted within five years of the date the questionnaire was administered.

Ultimately eleven churches participated in this study. The addition of a church from the original ten was because I was not sure one church was going to follow through in its participation. The churches are shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1. Churches Participating in Research Project—All Participants (N=11)**

<b>Church</b>	<b>City</b>
Hyde Park United Methodist Church	Tampa, FL
Crossroads Community Church (UMC)	Jacksonville, FL
First Presbyterian Church	Charlotte, NC
First United Methodist Church	Houston, TX
Spirit Garage (ELCA)	Minneapolis, MN
Salem Baptist Church	Chicago, IL
Pathways Church	Denver, CO
First Baptist Church	San Francisco, CA
National Presbyterian Church	Washington DC
Skyline Wesleyan Church	San Diego, CA
New Hope Wesleyan Church	Chapel Hill, NC

### **Instrumentation**

This research was a descriptive study and used a researcher-designed, cross-sectional social survey instrument developed to discover which of the five ministry areas for evangelism is most fruitful for reaching never churchd persons (Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney 159).

### **Social Survey/Questionnaire**

The questionnaire for this case study is researcher designed. Other instruments and surveys were consulted for appropriate and adequate questions. Questions fall into a number of sections. First is the basic demographic information. Second is a Church Involvement section with three questions designed to discover persons' involvement in their local churches. The rest of the questions all use a Likert scale for answers. First in this series are five questions relating to postmodernism, which explore the degree to which postmodern philosophy influences their lives. The next series of questions relate to

the discipleship and aim to discover how persons are developing as followers of Christ. Finally, ten questions form the structure of the evangelism ministry area section. The questionnaire contains two questions for each of the five ministry areas. Some of the questions are worded negatively and were reverse scored. Dan Agliata, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology candidate at the University of Central Florida, was consulted as the instrument was developed.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The questionnaire was pretested in Wilmore, Kentucky. It was administered in a classroom at Asbury Theological Seminary with seven persons. Instructions were given, and the length of time needed to complete the survey was noted. Results were processed, and a few minor edits were made to the questionnaire. The edits were superficial and did not require a second pretest.

### **Data Collection**

I contacted a number of pastors and church leaders from various urban churches around the United States that have never churched, urban, Generation X populations. The first point of contact was either a letter (see Appendix A) or a phone call with the basics of the letter followed by the letter itself. The letter describes the study and the need for at least twenty people to participate in the study from the stated delimitations. All of those in the study were converted within the previous five years but ten of the individuals were converted out of a never-churched background, while ten were converted out of a previously churched background.

Because of the limitations in the population, as well as concerns over the nature of the study, some churches chose not to participate. At this point the limit on only Anglo participation was broadened to include all ethnic backgrounds. Churches that initially

choose not to participate in the study were contacted again one year after the initial contact to see if they would like to participate. None responded back from the letters, and those that were contacted by phone again said, "No." In the end eleven churches chose to participate in the study, one of which was predominantly African-American Salem Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois.

One time was chosen by each church for the survey to be distributed and then I, or in the case of the San Diego church an assistant, traveled to the church to give the survey. At the appointed date and time, the survey was submitted. Directions were given (see Appendix C), and the questionnaire was handed out. Individuals were instructed to complete the questionnaire at that session. After all surveys were returned, the participants were invited to ask questions and stay for a discussion of the survey.

The only church that differed from this structure was Spirit Garage in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The pastor was pregnant, delivered her baby early and, in the process, was unable to gather the entire group. Therefore, in accordance with Dan Agliata and the literature, a number of persons were contacted via phone and e-mail from information given by the pastor. They were contacted with a letter and the survey. If they did not respond they were contacted again with another letter and survey. If they still did not respond an additional reminder letter was sent, following the process for research as discussed in Wiersma (173-79).

### **Data Analysis**

The data was collected between the spring of 2001 and the spring of 2003. After the data was collected, Dan Agliata took the survey and developed a computer tabulation program to analyze the data. Scale values were changed from alphabetical to numerical with A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5 for questions #7-20. Negatively worded questions were



reverse scored so that 1 indicated strong agreement and 5 indicated strong disagreement again for questions #7-20. For questions #21-30 responses were reversed so A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, E=1 and again negatively worded questions were reversed. The responses for the two questions concerning each ministry area were added together to give the total. The data from the questionnaire was analyzed with frequency and distribution analysis that provided percentages of respondents for each answer choice, as well as the mean response, standard deviation, and sample size of each group.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

This study was delimited to include only persons who are Protestant, Generation Xers, who live in urban communities. The goal was to find out in which ministry area this population is most effectively evangelized. Findings may be applicable to other population groups as well. This research will add to the information on evangelism in this postmodern age, especially as pertaining to postmodern persons themselves. The research also provides new data for all denominations and non-denominations in the process of evangelizing. Because of the ongoing process of urbanization and secularization, the results of this study may prove beneficial not only to urban churches but also to suburban and rural churches in the coming years. Certainly a great hope is that this research can be adapted and applied to the church I serve in downtown Orlando, Florida.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter presents the findings of this study beginning with a general discussion of the subjects who participated in the study. The purpose of this study was to discover the most fruitful ministry area for evangelism within urban, never churchd, Generation X populations. For purposes of this study, the ministry areas for evangelism studied were worship, small groups, service projects, narrative evangelism, and one-on-one evangelism.

Three research questions guided this study: Does the ministry area for effective evangelism differ between the ten never-churched persons and ten previously churchd persons in each of the eleven churches included in this study? In general, which of the five ministry areas for evangelism (worship, small groups, service projects, one-on-one witnessing, and narrative evangelism) is most effective in reaching never-churched, Protestant, urban Generation Xers? Given the dynamics of postmodernism, why is the leading ministry area so effective in the process of evangelism?

#### **Profile of the Subjects**

The survey was distributed to 342 people from eleven urban churches. No preference was given to sex, race, income, or marital status. The only limits were the individuals needed to be people who had come to faith within the past five years, attended an urban church, and were classified as Generation X. Of the people who participated, 122 were male, 209 were female, and eleven did not respond to the question. Table 4.1 gives the ethnic breakdown for the entire population of all churches. Approximately 90 percent of the Black/African-American population came from the church in Chicago.

**Table 4.1. All Participants' Ethnic Background (N=342)**

<b>Ethnic Background</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Asian/Pacific Islander	7	2.0
Black/African-American	75	21.9
Caucasian	245	71.6
Hispanic/Latino	5	1.5
Native American	6	1.8
Other	3	0.9
Did not answer	1	0.3
Total	342	100.0

Part of the limited nature of the study was to look at people who had been converted recently, specifically within the past five years. From the data gathered, approximately one-third (35.4 percent) fell within these parameters (see Table 4.2). Of the 342 participants, 121 fell into this parameter.

**Table 4.2. Years Since Conversion for Entire Study Population (N=342)**

<b>Years Since Conversion</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
0-1	44	12.8
1-2	32	9.4
3-5	45	13.2
6-10	23	6.7
10+	197	57.6
Did not answer	1	.3
Total	342	100.0

Again, part of the limited nature of this study was that it was to look at people who were classified as Generation X. As one can see from Table 4.3, those who participated in the study came from a variety of age brackets. One hundred seventeen fell into the strict parameters of Generation X as defined by this study as 26-37 years old in 2001.

**Table 4.3. Total Population's Age Categories (N=342)**

Age Category	n	%
13-16	0	0
17-25	33	9.7
26-37	117	34.2
38-60	141	41.2
61+	36	10.5
Did not answer	15	4.4
Total	342	100.0

### **Church Involvement Section**

Question 3 sought to discover the level of the participants' previous church involvement. For clarification purposes, when instructions were given for the survey, participants were given further instruction that for Q3 response "E" meant they did not grow up in a church and had only attended church a few other times and not on a consistent basis. For purposes of this study, responses "A, B, and E" are classified in the never church category. The other responses showed someone was not truly never

churched before attending their present community of faith. Table 4.4 shows the total number of responses for each question.

**Table 4.4. Previous Church Experience All Subjects (N=342)**

Question		n	%
a.	Never been to a church before.	3	0.9
b.	Attended church only once or twice before my present church.	6	1.8
c.	Grew up attending church, but then stopped.	52	15.2
d.	Grew up attending church and attended periodically as an adult.	93	27.2
e.	Did not grow up in a church, but attended other churches.	54	15.8
f.	Attended a church throughout my life.	84	24.5
g.	Attended another church immediately before coming to my present church.	50	14.6
Total		342	100.0

Questions 4, 5, and 6 sought to discover persons' involvement in their local churches. The participants indicated strong connection to their local churches as measured by frequency of worship, participation in small groups, and involvement in serving ministries. The data shows the participants are people who have come to faith and are active in their churches as shown in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5. Level of Church Participation (N=342)**

	<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>I attend worship at my church</b>			
Valid	Twice a year or less	3	.9
	Every few months	8	2.3
	Once a month	2	.6
	Twice a month	37	10.8
	Virtually every week	292	85.4
	Total	342	100.0
<b>I am involved in a small Christian group outside of worship</b>			
Valid	Yes	210	61.4
	No	130	38.0
	Total	340	99.4
	Did not answer		2
	Total	342	100.0
<b>I am involved in some sort of service ministry through my church</b>			
Valid	Twice a year or less	132	38.6
	Every few months	51	14.9
	Once a month	35	10.2
	Twice a month	25	7.3
	Virtually every week	89	26.0
	Total	332	97.1
	Did not answer		10
Total		342	100.0

### Postmodernism Section

Questions 7-11 were designed to survey the participants' postmodern outlook by asking five questions that discover the degree to which postmodern philosophy affects their frame of mind as outlined in the Review of Literature. Postmodernism section questions are as follows:

7. I tend to be skeptical of large institutions.
8. I value life experience more than intellectual understanding.
9. Relationships are more important to me than truth.
10. My closest friends are from my family of origin.
11. Sometimes I feel hopeless.

Question #8 tried to get at postmodern philosophy's assertion that life experience is more important than intellectual understanding. This is a difficult phenomenon to define as every experience has an intellectual component and vice versa. A thrust in postmodern philosophy, however, is that if an intellectual, rational, belief differs from one's own personal experience then personal experience is the trump card. For example, if someone knows intellectually that a leaf is green, but that person's experience is that a leaf is brown, then experience trumps broader knowledge. Postmodern philosophy argues no valid truth statement about the color of a leaf can be made; any statements are purely subjective, meaning life experience is most important. This example of a leaf is a superficial one, but it gets the point across.

Due to the wide age range of people ultimately surveyed, the postmodernism section was able to look at the influence of postmodernism across a spectrum of ages and church backgrounds. In general, across most age groups, ethnicity, local, and

churched/never-churched backgrounds, the participants showed an important leaning towards a postmodern outlook.

As a whole, the population studied exhibited postmodern influence with the exception of the “Life Experience” question as shown in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6. Influence of Postmodernism Questions: All Participants (N=342)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Institutions	337	2.78	1.15
Life experience	332	3.44	1.04
Relationships vs. Truth	333	2.24	0.98
Friends	331	3.15	1.22
Hopeless	339	2.6	1.28

The total never-churched population showed postmodern tendencies in only two categories. Those two categories are Relationships vs. Truth and Friends from family of Origin as shown in Table 4.7.



**Table 4.7. Influence of Postmodernism Questions: Never-Churched Population (N=45)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Institutions	45	3.156	1.28
Life experience	44	3.64	0.99
Relationships vs. Truth	44	2.48	1.05
Friends	43	3.28	1.1
Hopeless	45	3	1.3

From the data in Table 4.8, postmodernism has clearly had an influence on modern culture when looking at the five categories as defined in the literature, the one exception being the notion that intellectual understanding is less important than life experience.

**Table 4.8. Influence of Postmodernism Questions: Generation X Population (N=117)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Institutions	117	2.73	1.22
Life experience	117	3.50	1.00
Relationships vs. Truth	117	2.26	0.92
Friends	117	3.18	1.21
Hopeless	117	2.69	1.27

When the data is broken down even further to compare the difference between postmodernism's influence on never-churched Generation Xers and previously churched

Generation Xers, interesting data is obtained. For the previously churchd population, postmodernism has a high influence except in the category of life experience versus intellectual understanding. This was similar to the other populations as discussed earlier. In the never-churched population of Generation Xers, however, the influence of postmodernism was not as high. An equal number of people said they sometimes feel hopeless as those who indicated they did not. In addition, an equal number of people said they are skeptical of large institutions as those who are not skeptical. Like almost every other subgroup, the data shows that this population values intellectual understanding over life experience, which conflicts with the literature. This data is further broken down in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9. Influence of Postmodernism Questions: Never-Churched and Previously Churchd Generation X Populations**

<b>Total Never-Churched Gen X Population (N=19)</b>			
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Valid n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Institutions	19	3.05	1.35
Life experience	19	3.63	0.90
Relationships vs. Truth	19	2.37	0.96
Friends	19	3.68	0.82
Hopeless	19	3.16	1.30
<b>Total Previously Churchd Gen X Population (N= 24)</b>			
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Valid n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Institutions	24	2.71	1.30
Life experience	24	3.54	1.14
Relationships vs. Truth	24	1.91	0.65
Friends	24	3.13	1.39
Hopeless	24	2.63	1.28

When the data is analyzed to see patterns for entire age brackets, both 26-37-year-olds and 38-60-year-olds indicated postmodern tendencies in all categories except life experience. Seventeen twenty-five-year-olds showed postmodern characteristics in three categories: relationships vs. truth, friends from family of origin, and sometimes feel Hopeless. The 61+ category showed postmodern tendencies in relationships vs. truth, and Hopeless categories. No group indicated life experience versus intellectual understanding as the literature thought they would.

### **Discipleship Section**

Questions 12-20 were designed to look at the level of the participants' discipleship in the following categories: worship attendance, serving, mission involvement, Bible reading, tithing, experience of joy, small group attendance, sharing of faith, and the impact of the Bible on their ethical choices. The goal was to see if any of these areas of discipleship are being emphasized or de-emphasized in the population studied. Of these nine elements of discipleship, three were consistently the most important: worship, small groups, and the impact of the Bible on one's ethical life. These parts of new believers' discipleship are being developed very well. Unfortunately, virtually every population also indicated four elements lacking in their discipleship on a continual basis: tithing, experience of joy, serving, and mission involvement (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10. Discipleship Section for All Participants (N=342)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	336	4.48	0.81
Serving	334	2.23	1.07
Missions	335	2.33	1.16
Bible reading	336	4.02	1.01
Tithe	335	2.02	1.10
Joy	335	1.88	1.03
Small groups	331	4.09	0.95
Sharing faith	336	2.80	1.23
Ethics	336	4.41	0.80

When looking only at the never churchd participants, discipleship is having the biggest impact on worship, small groups, and the Bible's influence on ethics. Least impacted are joy, tithing, and missions as seen in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11. Discipleship Section: Total Never-Churched Participants (N=45)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	44	4.31	1.05
Serving	44	2.55	1.11
Missions	44	2.30	1.23
Bible reading	44	3.80	1.15
Tithe	44	2.05	1.16
Joy	44	1.98	1.23
Small groups	44	4.14	0.90
Sharing faith	44	2.90	1.27
Ethics	45	4.20	0.79

When defining the population for only Generation Xers, as seen in Table 4.12, the most important and least important categories clearly are the same as above, except that the Bible's ethical impact and worship attendance have changed places in importance.

**Table 4.12. Discipleship Section: Total Generation X Participants (N=117)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	115	4.44	0.83
Serving	116	2.38	1.18
Missions	116	2.22	1.10
Bible reading	117	4.0	1.07
Tithe	117	1.97	1.08
Joy	116	1.88	1.04
Small groups	115	4.12	0.98
Sharing faith	117	2.75	1.20
Ethics	116	4.47	0.61

When the data is analyzed to study the never churched Generation X participants, the results are the same with the exception that small groups are now third in importance (see Table 4:13).

**Table 4.13. Discipleship Section: Total Never-Churched Generation X Participants (N=19)**

Categories	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	19	4.21	0.98
Serving	19	2.58	1.12
Missions	19	2.32	1.56
Bible reading	19	3.47	1.22
Tithe	19	2.26	1.24
Joy	19	2.11	1.29
Small groups	19	3.89	1.10
Sharing faith	19	3.00	1.33
Ethics	19	4.21	0.79

In virtually every breakdown of the population, worship and ethics scored the highest in the Discipleship section. The only exception in the age breakdown was in the 17-25 age bracket where small groups was second and ethics was third. In addition, in every subsection of the population, and in the population as a whole, joy was last, and tithe was next to last except in the 38-60 age bracket where serving was next to last, and tithe was third from last.

### **Reliability**

The questionnaire used for this study was a researcher-designed instrument and consisted of four sections (see Appendix B). The sections were developed based on the research reported in Chapter 2. Questions 4-6 ascertained the subjects' involvement at their present churches and form the Church Involvement Section. Questions pertaining to the degree of postmodern influence form the Postmodern Influence Section questions (7-

11). Questions analyzing the participants' discipleship development are found in the Discipleship Development Section (questions 12-20). For the purposes of this dissertation, the fourth and final section is the most important. This is the Evangelism Ministry area section, and it gathered data in an effort to discover which of the five ministry areas for evangelism is most important in coming to faith.

Respondents rated each of the questions on the front with the appropriate data. Some were "Yes/No" questions, while others had multiple options from which to choose. Questions on the back, 7-30, were each rated on a five-point Likert scale (Wiersma 171). Negatively worded items were reverse scored to correspond with the positively worded items in the appropriate section. In most cases a mean score is reported as well as the standard deviation (S.D.).

### **Research Question 1**

Does the ministry area for effective evangelism differ between the ten never-churched persons and ten previously churched persons in each of the ten churches included in this study?

The first question sought to discover whether the best ministry area for evangelism differs between never churched persons and previously churched persons in each of the eleven churches studied. Questions 21-30 addressed this as follows in Table 4.14.



**Table 4.14. Evangelism Section Question #s and Corresponding Ministry Area**

Questions #s	Evangelism Ministry area
23,26	Worship
21,30	Small groups
24,28	Serving
22,29	Narrative evangelism
25,27	One-on-one evangelism

The results of the data were limited to Generation Xers who came to faith within the previous five years. Previously churchd Generation X persons answered question 3 with “C, D, F, or G.” Never-churched persons answered question 3 with “A, B, or E.” “S.D.” is an abbreviation for “Standard Deviation.” The higher the mean score, the more important is the ministry area in coming to faith. The number in parentheses indicates the number of people (n) that fell into these limited categories from each church. Table 4.15 details the information for each church. For Table 4.15 “W, SG, SP, NE, and OOOE” stand for “Worship, Small Groups, Service Projects, Narrative Evangelism, and One-on-One Evangelism.”

**Table 4.15. Most Effective Evangelism Ministry Area Comparison between Previously Churched and Never-Churched Populations for Each City, Ages 26-37**

City	n		Worship	Small Groups	Service Projects	Narrative Evang.	O-O-O* Evang.
<b>Chicago</b>							
Previously churched	11	Mean	8.09	5.81	6.55	7.36	6.0
		S.D.	1.51	1.66	2.02	1.75	2.34
Never churched	4	Mean	8.4	5.0	7.25	8.5	6.75
		S.D.	.577	2.00	1.89	1.73	2.75
<b>Houston</b>							
Previously churched	1	Mean	8.0	6.0	8.0	9.0	6.0
		S.D.	0	0	0	0	0
Never churched	0	Mean		-	-	-	-
		S.D.		-		-	-
<b>Minnesota</b>							
Previously churched	0	Mean	-	-	-	-	-
		S.D.		-	-	-	-
Never churched	4	Mean	6.25	8.5	4.5	8.5	6.0
		S.D.	1.26	1.0	1.29	1.0	2.83
*O-O-O Evang. Stands for One-on-One Evangelism							
<b>San Francisco</b>							
Previously churched	3	Mean	7.33	4.33	8.67	7.67	6.33
		S.D.	1.53	.58	1.15	3.21	4.04
Never churched	3	Mean	5.0	9.0	7.33	8.33	5.67
		S.D.	1.0	1.0	1.15	.56	3.51
<b>Charlotte</b>							
Previously churched	0	Mean	-	-			-
		S.D.	-	-			
Never churched	0	Mean	-	-		-	-
		S.D.	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Jacksonville</b>							
Previously churched	1	Mean	5.0	10.0	8.0	10.0	6.0
		S.D.	0	0	0	0	0
Never churched	1	Mean	6.0	8.0	8.0	7.0	8.0

**Table 4.15. Most Effective Evangelism Ministry area Comparison between Previously Churched and Never Churchd Populations for Each City, Ages 26-37, continued**

City	n		Worship	Small Groups	Service Projects	Narrative Evang.	O-O-O Evang.
		S.D.	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Washington D.C.</b>							
Previously churchd	0	Mean	-	-	-		-
		S.D.	-		-		
Never churchd	0	Mean	-	-		-	-
		S.D.		-	-		-
<b>San Diego</b>							
Previously churchd	2	Mean	9.0	7.0	7.0	8.0	9.0
		S.D.	1.41	1.41	1.41	2.83	1.41
Never churchd	2	Mean	8.5	7.0	7.0	9.0	4.0
		S.D.	.71	1.41	1.41	0	0
<b>Chapel Hill</b>							
Previously churchd	1	Mean	9.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	4.0
		S.D.	0	0	0	0	0
Never churchd	1	Mean	8.0	8.0	6.0	8.0	8.0
		S.D.	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Denver</b>							
Previously churchd	5	Mean	4.6	6.6	6.6	8.2	4.8
		S.D.	1.67	2.61	2.79	1.64	2.95
Never churchd	2	Mean	8.0	5.0	3.5	9.5	6.0
		S.D.	0	1.41	2.12	.71	5.66
<b>Tampa</b>							
Previously churchd	0	Mean		-		-	-
		S.D.	-	-	-		-
Never churchd	2	Mean	6.5	7.5	6.5	7.0	5.0
		S.D.	.71	.71	.71	1.41	1.41

As is evident from the data, not very many people in any church fit the specific description of this section as a Generation Xer converted within the previous five years. In each church the most important ministry area differed except for Denver where narrative evangelism was most important for both never-churched and previously churched persons. Jacksonville showed a tie between narrative evangelism and small groups for the previously churched person, while the never-churched population tied with small groups, service projects, and one-one-one evangelism. Again, only in Denver was the most important ministry area for evangelism the same in both the previously churched and never-churched populations.

### Research Question 2

In general, which of the five ministry areas for evangelism of worship, small groups, narrative evangelism, service projects, and one-one-witnessing is most effective in reaching never-churched, Protestant, urban persons?

When looking across all the eleven churches studied as a whole, one ministry area did predominate over the others. Narrative evangelism was the dominant ministry area by far as shown in Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16. Total Never-Churched Population in regards to Most Important Evangelism Ministry Area N=45**

Categories	Question #s	Valid n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	23,26	44	7.16	1.84
Small groups	21,20	44	6.91	1.96
Service projects	24,28	44	6.20	1.82
Narrative evang.	22,29	43	8.05	1.45
One-on-One evang.	25,27	44	5.34	2.25

Narrative evangelism was by far the most important factor in never-churched persons coming to faith. Though other areas were important as well, noticeably worship and small groups, but narrative evangelism was statistically much more important. Serving was fourth in importance, and one-one-one evangelism was a distant fifth in terms of its impact on never churched persons coming to faith.

When the data is analyzed looking at only never-churched Generation Xers, the data yields similar results as noted in Table 4.17, though worship and small groups, while still close in importance, have switched in importance.

**Table 4.17. Total Generation X Never-Churched Population in regards to Most Important Evangelism Ministry Area (N=19)**

Categories	Question #s	Valid n	Missing n	Mean	S.D.
Worship	23,26	19	0	7.05	1.51
Small groups	21,20	19	0	7.16	1.95
Service projects	24,28	19	0	6.16	1.89
Narrative evang.	22,29	19	0	8.37	1.16
One-on-One evang.	25,27	19	0	6.00	2.65

### Research Question 3

Given the dynamics of postmodernism, why is the leading evangelism ministry area so effective in the process of evangelism?

This question gets at the heart of this dissertation. In order to understand the answer one needs to remember some of the key elements of postmodernism: the lack of meta-narrative (a grand, overarching story), the importance of personal experience (as

opposed to simply reading of a previous generation's experience), the de-emphasizing of truth (one person's understanding of truth is as good as any other's even if they seem mutually exclusive), and the importance of community. Each of these dynamics rings true in narrative evangelism. Narrative evangelism entails a community and friendship, even if it is only a community of two persons. For postmoderns, this community and friendship is crucial to developing trust, an item that seems relatively absent from most postmoderns. Trust has been deformed in a number of ways, and often only a friend can offer the story of Jesus that has been so distorted by the powers that be in previous generations. When a friend shares the story of Christ, it is often more easily believed because the experience is more real and the person sharing is more credible. No, it is not the never-churched person's story yet, but because a friend told the story, it is much more experiential than if someone told it on TV. Finally, a personal sharing of the faith with a friend seems to tell more easily the grand story of faith, the meta-narrative. A core element of postmodernism is that all meta-narratives include and exclude some populations. The ones excluded are powerless and the ones included wield their power destructively, according to postmodern theory. Personal sharing of the Christian story with a friend helps the never-churched, postmodern person see the Christian story as a wonderful story for all people, not just the privileged few. Personal sharing with a friend helps that person see that really following Jesus empowers love and service, not subjugative power, and when the latter occurs it is always an abuse of what God intends.

The literature led me to suppose that small groups would be the most important factor by which never churched persons came to faith (Barna, Turn-Around Churches 84; Easum and Bandy 157; Ford and Denny 9; Galloway 10; George, Prepare Your Church 41; Stewart and Bennett 194; Stockstill 52; Higginbotham 2). Indeed, I presupposed the

most effective ministry area for evangelism had shifted from worship-oriented evangelism to small group-oriented evangelism. As postmodernism becomes more and more entrenched in culture, I was not surprised that one-on-one evangelism was not as meaningful as the other ministry areas. Neither was I really surprised that serving, though important to Christian discipleship, was not the most important ministry area for evangelism. I presumed small groups would be the most important ministry area for evangelism.

The reason narrative evangelism seems to be more important than small groups and worship is because of the deeply personal element. Small groups, of course, encourage relationships, but deep friendships are most often nurtured in the one-on-one time. This intimate time with a friend that provides the opportunity to share life's deep questions, joys, and pain. Here, in intimate friendship, secrets are shared and bridges built over which the transforming love of Christ can be shared, one with another. Clearly, sharing of the faith does happen in small groups, but it is in the most intimate of times that a never-churched, postmodern person is truly receptive to faith.

### **Summary of Significant Findings**

1. Very few never-churched persons, as defined by the parameters of this study, took the survey in the eleven churches that participated.
2. The postmodern section showed important degrees of postmodern influence among every age, locale, and degree of previous church involvement.
3. The literature's indication that postmodern people value life experience more than intellectual understanding was not validated by this study.
4. Narrative evangelism was the most important ministry area for evangelism in both previously churched and never-churched Generation X persons.

5. Narrative evangelism was the most important ministry area for evangelizing the total population of both previously churched and never-churched persons.

6. One-on-one evangelism is the least important ministry area in every age and locale with the exception of Houston where it was fourth out of the five ministry areas.



## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The heart of this research project comes out of a desire to understand further our changing culture and religious landscape. While the Church of Jesus Christ is thriving in many parts of the world, and while parts of the body of Christ in the United States are healthy, most of the major indicators show the North American Church in the twenty-first century to be in trouble. North American culture needs a new Jonah to come and share with it the good news of God in Christ. The reasons for the decline in church participation are numerous and not the focus of this research. The point of this research was to look at how people in the ever-growing, never-churched population are coming to a healthy and holy relationship with Christ.

This research holds special importance for me. The communities of faith I serve are in an urban area that is predominantly unchurched. Thousands of people live in and around the downtown core of Orlando, Florida, and thousands more move in every year. Yet the vast majority is not part of any community of faith. New Hope started a few years ago in an effort to share the good news of God in Christ with this wonderful population. New Hope started because a group of people did not want to be like Jonah. We did not want to hold back from sharing this wonderful story. We wanted to share the story in healthy ways with people who either had never heard the full story of God, or who had never believed the story. We, unlike Jonah, want to share this story; we do not want to run. Starting New Hope, however, has proved difficult, as we have found it hard to draw people to the good news of God in Christ. This research sought to discover which ministry area was most important in helping this wonderful population of unchurched persons see and believe in our incredible God.

### **Data for Study Population**

The lack of data for the target population means making observations regarding Research Question 1 would be tenuous at best. In the end, the population that took the survey did not fully fit into the delimitations so no comparisons could be made between ten previously churchd and ten never-churchd Generation Xers from each church. Some preliminary indications can be offered, but more research would need to be done to be conclusive. The primary observation is that for previously churchd persons worship was the most important ministry area with narrative evangelism being of second importance. For the never-churchd populations, narrative evangelism was most important with small groups being of second importance. This difference does support my thesis that a difference exists between the two populations. On the other hand, narrative evangelism's importance also shows my thesis about small groups being the most important ministry area for younger, more never-churchd populations is not accurate. Rather, narrative evangelism may be more important.

### **Significant Findings**

A number of important findings, in the evangelism and postmodernism sections, rise out of the data.

#### **Evangelism Section**

Narrative evangelism is the most important ministry area for evangelism when the eleven churches are analyzed for people who came to faith within the past five years. Narrative evangelism was either the most important ministry area or tied for most important at eight churches both within never-churchd and previously churchd populations. In two churches where narrative evangelism was not the most important, it was the second most important ministry area for evangelism.

Worship was the second most important ministry area. It was the most important ministry area in three churches in the previously churchd category and for four churches in the never-churchd category. One-one-one evangelism was the least important ministry area for the population. It was the least important ministry area in nine of the eleven churches for their previously churchd persons, and for never-churchd persons it was the lowest in seven of eleven. In each case when it was not last, it was second to last. Not only is narrative evangelism important for the entire population who participated in the study, but in this research it was true in virtually every subcategory of the population including age, locale, etc.

Narrative evangelism was also the most effective for the never-churchd population as a whole who came to faith within the previous five years. Interestingly, narrative evangelism was the most effective ministry area for the entire population studied, be it previously churchd or never churchd. Age, previous church involvement, locale (except for Chicago and Charlotte), did not matter. Generation X may place an especially high value on relationships, but according to this study relationships are very important to other generations as well. This relational nature is especially important in sharing the gospel and is a wake-up call for how the Church is actually inviting people into a relationship and journey with God through Christ.

Narrative evangelism and one-one-one evangelism may have been so divergent in the population studied for a number of reasons. The element of friendship, and the implicit trust involved in friendship, seems to be the primary difference between narrative evangelism and one-one-one evangelism. Usually one-one-one evangelism involves only a surface relationship—no friendship, community, or trust. With trust being so low in this postmodern culture, people have a difficult time seeing the importance and relevance of

faith unless at least a semblance of relationship exists between the persons. The key element from the data is the element of community. Being in a community may be the most important aspect of coming to faith today. People connect with a community, even if it is only a community of two or three, and from that community come to faith. The importance of community shows a radically different pattern and philosophy from the one that says one comes first to Christ and then becomes part of the community.

Individualized conversion was more prevalent in previous generations when the culture had more of a Christian foundation and understanding. Today the key element is community. The community of worship is important. The community experienced in small groups is important. The community experienced between two people, however, who have an ongoing relationship where the invitation to be a follower of Christ seems to be the most fruitful.

This crucial nature of community should not surprise followers of Christ, though it may surprise the modern world that is so fascinated with mechanistic structures and large organizations. Jesus preached to the crowds, sent out the seventy two-by-two, focused on the twelve disciples, and concentrated even more on three of his disciples. After his resurrection, that small group of disciples and a handful of other men and women to whom Jesus devoted himself, were the ones who gave initial leadership to the community of faith, not the masses. It was a community that brought his message to the world, and it was the community that he focused on and nurtured. Interestingly, this concentration on the relationships preceding faith in Christ is similar to Jesus' pattern of discipleship. His first request of those who became closest to him, the twelve disciples, was to follow him (Matt. 4:19). After following for a while, sometimes a number of

years, Jesus invited them to have faith in him (John 14:10). Others, like Peter, through the act of following, developed faith (Matt. 16:16).

Evangelism within small groups, which I presumed was the most important category, and narrative evangelism share a relational element. Though service projects as a ministry area for evangelism can have a relational element, it is often a short-term relationship. Worship has some personal contact, but it is much less than within a small group or one-on-one friendship. One-one-one evangelism as defined by this study is evangelism in which no previous relationship exists. Street-corner evangelism would be an example. One-one-one evangelism is also the least relational of the five ministry areas studied. Each of the others have at least a modicum of a relationship, even if it is only hearing a person preach from a distant pulpit or helping serve in a food line with other people. One-one-one evangelism is an immediate thrust of the Gospel on someone by a person with whom they have never spoken. The data shows that one-one-one evangelism is sometimes effective, but for the population it was almost universally the least effective. The less relationally oriented the type of evangelism, the less effective according to this study, across all subsets of data.

### **Postmodernism Section**

To test the degree to which subjects had been impacted by postmodernism, five questions were asked that dealt with five specific items the literature found to be especially relevant to postmodern persons. In the 26-37 age range, both in previously churching and never-churched populations, four of the five factors proved accurate. What was a bit surprising was that the same was true in the 38-60 population as a whole. Never churching and previously churching alike, therefore, in these two age brackets have been truly impacted by postmodern thought. Seventeen to twenty-five-year-olds in the study

also showed a connection with three categories, while the 61+ age group only answered affirmatively in two categories.

Postmodern philosophy has almost totally infiltrated modern society, even within Christian circles, though disturbing, should not be surprising. North American culture is inundated with postmodern philosophy at almost every level. Even though some of the underlying concerns about power and language that are the root of postmodern philosophy are real and need to be addressed, some of the consequences of postmodernism as outlined in the literature review are destructive. That postmodern philosophy's worldview constructs are so evident within the Christian population is something of which the Church needs to be aware. The relativity of truth, hopelessness, skepticism of institutions, and declining importance of family relationships will have a tremendous impact on churches, if they do not already.

Of the five categories in the postmodernism section, the only one universally negated by the research is the one that tested the literature's assertion that postmodern people tend to trust and value life experience more than intellectual understanding. According to the literature, personal experience, personal interaction, and personal dialogue are much more important than anyone else's testimony or scientific data (Benedict and Miller 35). Surprisingly, the question that dealt with valuing life experience more than intellectual understanding showed this assertion to be invalid within the population studied. The same question was also invalid for almost every subsection of the population. Importantly, it was the one missing postmodern element of the postmodern section for both 26-37 and 38-60 age categories.

This may be a relatively new phenomenon. Could the events of 11 September 2001 have had an impact on this element of postmodern philosophy? It may also be a

growing awareness that humans cannot all experience everything. A native Chinese person cannot experience growing up in Nazi Germany. That does not preclude the Chinese national, however, from gaining an understanding, at least to a degree, of growing up in Nazi Germany. It also does not preclude the Chinese person from making a judgment or critique of Nazi Germany based on what has been learned. Postmodern philosophy, at its core, argues that the Chinese person can never pass a real judgment or critique over the rightness or wrongness of the Nazi system except that it ultimately used its power to oppress non-Nazis. The question of whether the Chinese person could really understand the Nazi system, and then critique it, is a moot point because the Chinese person did not personally experience the Nazi system. The tragedy of 11 September 2001 may truly have opened the world's eyes to the flaws of postmodernism at this point. That terrible day may have forced some people to see that one can make moral judgments and evaluate events and ideas even though those ideas and events may occur outside the circle of their own experience.

An important question needs to be addressed: Is this divergence from the literature due to a changing culture, i.e., personal experience is no longer as important as intellectual understanding for most people in North American culture? Perhaps, this framework changes when a person becomes a follower of Christ.

The Church needs to know the answer to this question. If true, it would reflect a shift in the postmodern worldview, potentially making easier the effort to present the truth claims of Christianity as valid for all persons, even when challenging one's personal experience is required. People could be challenged to understand the real Jesus, even though they were not alive two thousand years ago to experience him in the flesh. This is good news for sharing the Christian story.

If the latter is true, that a person's framework relating to postmodernism changes after becoming a follower of Christ, and now intellectual understanding is more important than personal experience, then the Church needs to know this reality. It would show that the subjects processed information in new ways after becoming Christians and that the postmodern worldview is still alive and well in non-Christians. New followers of Christ perhaps relied more on personal experience in the past, but after becoming followers of Christ and giving intellectual credence to the Christian faith, they came to see intellectual understanding as at least equal to personal experience and maybe in some cases as more important. This new reality would also be good news for sharing the Christian story for it would further reveal the transformational nature of the gospel. In addition, if the latter is true, it shows that evangelism must still operate on the assumption that personal experience is more important than intellectual understanding for most persons. Finally, if the latter were true, it would help the Church understand why the category of relationships versus truth still shows a leaning toward the postmodern worldview of valuing relationships over truth and help the church deal with this view.

Another facet to this issue would be any relationship between the importance of narrative evangelism and the divergence between this study and the literature in regards to intellectual understanding and personal experience. Narrative evangelism's personal nature may help people come to grips with the inherent tension between personal experience with a Christ who walked this earth two thousand years ago and intellectual understanding. Narrative evangelism may help people gain an understanding that leads to an experience with a living God though they can not explain him. They agree with the Apostle Paul that faith is "foolishness" to the world but to them has become the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23).



**Valuing relationships more than truth.** As mentioned above, relationships vs. truth still shows a strong postmodern influence while intellectual understanding versus personal experience seems to have shifted and was not supported by this study. Why is the former still a strong reality while the latter seems to wane, as they both seem to deal with issues of truth? In short, the reason for the difference seems to be that they are qualitatively different questions and deal with different, though related, characteristics of postmodern life.

The first category, truth versus relationships, gets at a core concern of Derrida's postmodern philosophy, namely, that possession of truth leads to power, which in turn leads to oppression. This is a "value" category. Postmodern persons tend to value relationships more than truth because truth has been known to break down relationships. Many persons today, even those in the population studied, have great concerns over how the truth of Christianity will be used in relation to other populations. Community, after all, is a foundational element for most cultures and especially postmodern culture. In the past, one group making truth claims different from their community often fractured the community. Many apparently fear community will again be broken over truth claims. So even though the people in the study came to believe the Christian path is the truth path, they are hesitant to sacrifice a friendship for it. So when asked, "Which do you value more, truth or relationships?" the answer is almost always "relationships." One great challenge for the Church is to articulate how the process of growing in the fruits of the spirit allows persons to make truth claims that do not assert power of others, but rather calls them to Christ's freedom. Followers of Christ, like Jesus, proclaim the truth of God's revelation in Christ, and the implications of that revelation, but do not try to manipulate or force others into faith. This use of power is where so many great mistakes

have been made in Christian history, the Crusades most prominently. Due to the abuse in the past, the Church needs to tread lightly, knowing the fear of misused power is real and effects how people respond to the gospel.

The second issue of “Personal Experience vs. Intellectual Understanding” is not a “value” as the above category, but more of a “processing” category. So if the question were, “When processing information which do you give the most credence to, your own experience or intellectual understanding?” the literature surmised that the former was more important. This research showed that for persons who became Christians, intellectual understanding was more important. Christian theology uses both personal experience and intellectual understanding (along with Scripture and tradition) to formulate doctrine. These four are constant and the question is which of the four is most important.

Again, a good question to study would be, “Is information always processed with a bias toward intellectual understanding over personal experience, or does this change after becoming a Christian?” Again, a relationship exists between the two postmodern categories of relationships versus truth and personal experience versus intellectual understanding but they are different reflections of postmodern thought.

Overarching this discussion is the entire nature of truth as it relates to the Christian faith. Truth claims are important to the Christian faith. Truth is crucial to the Christian story, and it is an important element to sharing the Christian story. So a healthy teaching by the Church about how the truth claims of Scripture can be shared without sacrificing relationships seems to be in order. The story of Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) can be a model for presenting truth claims in postmodern culture. Jesus met her, engaged her, developed what was apparently a

trusting relationship with her, and then shared the truth with her. He was not abusive in his position of power. Rather, he developed a relationship with her that she seemingly viewed as healthy, engaging, and inviting, and in turn she went and told her friends about him. If the Church could model Jesus' evangelism, one that was straightforward about truth claims but also focused on building relationships instead of destroying those who did not believe, people who become followers of Christ in this postmodern age will see that the Christian faith's truth claims do not lead to power but rather to servanthood (John 13). They would see that truly Christian truth claims do not lead to oppression but freedom. After all, Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Postmodern persons may prove remarkably similar to the Ninevites. They may prove to be persons who, though hesitant to believe this new faith, when confronted by the truth claims in love, come to see the vast richness of faith in God.

### **Unexpected Findings and Conclusions**

A number of unexpected findings rose out of the data and impacted the conclusions of this study.

#### **Low Numbers of Never-Churched Persons**

According to the data collected, not many people truly fit into the "never-churched" category, at least not when defined as people who had come to faith within the past five years. Generation Xers seemed to especially have some semblance of a church background. Only 61 people answered "A, B, or E" to question 3, which was the key question for determining never churched categories. Of those 61, 45 came to faith within the past five years that was the limitation of this study. I believe the numbers are small for two reasons.

First, some of the churches most renowned for their ability to reach out to Generation X did not participate in the study. Many churches were hesitant to ask their people to participate in the study for fear of how these new followers would react to the idea of being “studied.” This concern seems to relate to many postmodern person’s anxiety that information and knowledge are used to gain power over others. Each of the pastors seemed to fear their parishioners would ask the question, “Is this survey going to be used to show how to manipulate others into becoming Christians?” Even though their individual conversions were sincere, authenticity in faith and sharing the faith was a major concern. Anything that borders on a lack of authenticity is rejected. Right or wrong, this hesitancy made it difficult to collect the delimited research data; therefore, the study included churches that said they were reaching the population but which were not well known to do so.

Second, perhaps the percentage of truly never churched persons, even in urban centers, is not very large. Maybe the population is there, and it may even be growing, but it could be too small to gather statistical information for a project such as this. The researcher may have overestimated the number of people who were really never churched. Nevertheless, according to the literature and my beliefs, the first reason seems to be the more accurate. The population exists, but it proved difficult to study. Whatever the reason, only thirteen percent of the population for this study were never-churched persons and an even smaller number of them were of the Generation X age bracket.

The implication of the small percentage of never-churched persons may be two fold. First, it may indicate that pastors and churches are simply overly optimistic about who they are actually reaching. Clearly churches are reaching people who have not been part of a church for a long time or who may have been involved in communities of faith

but were not committed to Christ. In the population studied at each church, however, the participants were much more of a previously churchd category of people as opposed to never-churched persons. Therefore, assuming a significant and growing never-churched population, the question must be asked, “Are mainline Protestant churches really reaching this growing never churchd population?”

### **Low Elements of Discipleship**

One area of concern for to me came to light in the Discipleship section. Across all ages, locale, and church background, was remarkable consistency in the three categories of least importance for discipleship. The three categories dealt with experience of joy, tithing, and serving others.

Two hundred and eighty-five of the 342 respondents strongly agreed or agreed to the statement, “I would not describe myself as a joyful person.” Only thirty-one disagreed or strongly disagreed. If joy is a characteristic of a follower of Christ, only around 10 percent of the population studied makes that claim. Within the never churchd population converted within the past five years (forty-five respondents), thirty-six do not describe themselves as joyful while six did. This seems to be an important area for the church to engage. Biblical joy differs from our culture’s preoccupation with happiness. Though persons taking the survey may have equated the two, the almost universally low responses leads me to think that both happiness and joy are rarely experienced even among Christians. Yet one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. Apparently the Church needs to grow in its ability to point people of faith toward the joyful life.

Though disappointing, I was not as surprised that tithing and serving are not as important in the discipleship of most Christians. What is surprising is the joy deficit.

What is also not surprising is that worship, Bible study, and the Bible's ethical impact were consistently in the top three of the Discipleship section.

### **Implications of Findings and Practical Applications**

One of the clear implications of this study is the incredible importance of a personal invitation to follow Christ. Corporate invitations are important in worship and small groups, and they play a role in helping people truly commit their lives to Christ. The most important step, however, according to this research, is in the one-on-one invitation by a person with a previous relationship with the person coming to faith. This finding has implications for how laypersons and pastors structure their time. How much time do they spend in personal invitation? How much time do they spend nurturing relationships so they can help a person come to faith when the Spirit leads them? How are they training people to share their faith with their close friends? These questions are important because personal invitation and discussion are the primary instrument through which their friend might come to faith.

A second class of implications deals with postmodernism. The vast majority of persons in this study under the age of sixty were affected by postmodern thought, which shows the broad impact of postmodernism not only on Generation X, but on all generations. This is true not only outside the church walls, but also within the church each Sunday morning. This study shows that pastors should not think that the postmodern world is a world outside their church. To the contrary, it is a worldview and philosophy that affects most of their parishioners. It has dramatic effects on how the Church presents the truth claims of the gospel. Christians need to clearly say they do not proclaim the gospel so other religions can be subjugated or denigrated; rather, the aim is to make

known the full revelation of God, the full truth, so that all persons can be liberated in light of that truth and then experience the fulfillment God intends for them.

Postmodernism has clear implications on most persons' ability and desire to trust the Church. If most are skeptical of large institutions, what are the implications for the megachurch movement? How does this impact the home church movement? What does postmodernism tell the Church about denominational structures and the present funding patterns?

An important characteristic of postmodernism is hopelessness, and this research showed hopelessness to be a real concern even for Christian converts. What is the impact of hopelessness on Christians as they are discipled? How does it impact preaching? How does it affect people's views that the kingdom of God is here and will one day be fulfilled? These are all very important issues of which the postmodernism section shows the Church needs to be aware.

### **Weaknesses of the Study**

This study could have been strengthened if it had been able to survey more churches that seem to reach out to never-churched populations in important ways. A couple of churches that were surveyed seemed to fall into this category, but the study would have been much better to get more people from those few churches, as well as survey some churches that closed their doors to this project. Their concern about how never-churched populations would respond is understandable, but the same churches also have a lot to teach the body of Christ. Helping the Church as a whole is difficult without help from these churches, and others.

Because of the struggle to get into some churches, only a small percentage of people fit into the target group. For instance in the end, many did not fall into the strict

Generation X category as I strictly defined it. In addition, the two-year limit on time since conversion (which was the original limitation of the study) had to be extended to five years in order to get any sort of productive data. A broader study would have helped get more data in this area.

In addition, answer G in Question 3 (Attended another church immediately before coming to my present church) was not very helpful. The study would have been strengthened had it not been offered as a possible response.

Finally, the age category of 38-60 was too broad. Though some of the literature puts Baby Boomers in this broad age group, most give less than a twenty-two year period for this generation. I focused on Generation X, so I was not as concerned about the Boomer age bracket, but now that the study is complete, I wish I had limited it further.

### **Further Studies**

Narrative evangelism is clearly the most important ministry area for inviting people into a vital relationship with God. Six follow up studies come to my mind.

1. One might explore the relational aspects that make personal invitation by a friend so important.

2. Another study could analyze the process in which never churched persons are disciplined after coming to faith.

3. After seeing the universally low marks given to one-on-one evangelism, a study might be conducted to see if one-one-one evangelism actually has more of a negative effect on the never churchd than it does benefit those who ultimately become followers of Christ. This potential study would entail surveying people who have not become followers of Christ as people who have come to faith to see the effect one-one-one evangelism had on them.



4. One could seek to discover some of the reasons and dynamics why so few followers of Christ claim to have real joy in their lives.

5. Another researcher could determine how the ministry area for evangelism differs between Generation X persons of different ethnic backgrounds.

6. A longitudinal study of a population could investigate how or if the postmodern characteristic of intellectual understanding versus personal experience changes as a person becomes a follower of Christ. This study shows the literature (as relates to intellectual understanding vs. personal experience) may be incorrect. Further research might discover if the same population valued personal experience more before conversion or if intellectual understanding was always more important.

## APPENDIX A

### Invitation Letter to Participate in Research

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As you may be aware, I am working on a dissertation project for my Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. I hope the results of this research will be fruitful for all churches as we seek to reach out to those presently outside our church walls. My project is looking at the ministry areas in which what I call “never churched persons” come to faith—worship, small groups, one-on-one evangelism, narrative evangelism, or service projects. I’ve developed a short questionnaire that I will submit to twenty people in ten different churches. For the purposes of this study, ten of these persons would need to be people who came to faith out of a never churched background, while the other ten would need to be people who came to faith out of a previously churched background. Additionally, they need to be “Generation X” persons, approximately between the ages of 26 and 37.

I would come and administer the questionnaire. It should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. I can submit the questionnaire at your and the church’s convenience.

If you are interested I would need three things from you:

1. Choose an appropriate day and time for the twenty to gather.
2. Contact the persons and invite them or #3.
3. E-mail or mail me the names, address, phones, and or e-mail of the twenty people.
4. I would send a letter to those twenty persons from you that says you know and support this project and would like for them to participate if they can. I would send that letter to you first for your approval.

I’d love to talk with you more about this project. I know it will be helpful to us at New Hope as we begin and I think we may get some info that would be helpful to you as well.

Peace,

Jack Jackson

Encl. Questionnaire

**APPENDIX B**

<b>Name</b>	<i>(optional)</i>	<b>Questionnaire Phone or email</b>	<i>(optional)</i>
<b>City</b>		<b>Age</b>	13-16 17-25 26-37 38-60 61+
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male      Female</i>		<b>Today's Date</b>

*Circle the letter that best answers describes your answer. Choose only one answer unless otherwise noted.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. Ethnic background:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Asian or Pacific Islander</li> <li>b. Black or African American</li> <li>c. Caucasian</li> <li>d. Hispanic or Latino</li> <li>e. Native American</li> <li>f. Other</li> </ul> | <p><b>2. Time since coming to faith in Christ:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. 0-1 years</li> <li>b. 1-2 years</li> <li>c. 3-5 years</li> <li>d. 6-10 years</li> <li>e. over 10 years</li> </ul> |
|---|--|
- 3. Before coming to my present church, my previous church experience can best be described as:**  
*(circle all answers that apply)*
- a. Never been to a church before.
  - b. Attended church only once or twice before my present church.
  - c. Grew up attending church, but then stopped.
  - d. Grew up attending church and attended periodically as an adult.
  - e. Did not grow up in a church, but attended other churches previously.
  - f. Attended a church throughout my life.
  - g. Attended another church immediately before coming to my present church.
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>4. I attend worship at my church:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Twice a year or less</li> <li>b. Every few months</li> <li>c. Once a month</li> <li>d. Twice a month</li> <li>e. Virtually every week</li> </ul> | <p><b>5. I'm involved in some sort of small Christian group outside of worship:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Yes</li> <li>b. No</li> </ul> |
|--|---|
- 6. I'm involved in some sort of service ministry through my church:**
- a. Twice a year or less
  - b. Every few months
  - c. Once a month
  - d. Twice a month
  - e. Virtually every week

*Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement below using the following scale. Circle only one response.*

	<b>A-Strongly Agree</b>	<b>B-Agree</b>	<b>C-Neither/No opinion</b>	<b>D-Disagree</b>	<b>E-Strongly Disagree</b>
7.					<b>ABCDE</b>
8.					<b>ABCDE</b>
9.					<b>ABCDE</b>
10.					<b>ABCDE</b>
11.					<b>ABCDE</b>
12.					<b>ABCDE</b>
13.					<b>ABCDE</b>
14.					<b>ABCDE</b>
15.					<b>ABCDE</b>
16.					<b>ABCDE</b>
17.					<b>ABCDE</b>
18.					<b>ABCDE</b>
19.					<b>ABCDE</b>
20.					<b>ABCDE</b>
21.					<b>ABCDE</b>
22.					<b>ABCDE</b>
23.					<b>ABCDE</b>
24.					<b>ABCDE</b>
25.					<b>ABCDE</b>
26.					<b>ABCDE</b>
27.					<b>ABCDE</b>
28.					<b>ABCDE</b>
29.					<b>ABCDE</b>
30.					<b>ABCDE</b>

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Narrative Directions When Distributing Survey**

“Good evening. Thank you so much for taking the time to come and take this short survey. What we’re going to do tonight is take a few minutes to take the survey, and then if you have any questions about it afterwards I’d be happy to answer them or share some of the reasons for this study.

Turn to your sheets. First of all, note that there are questions on the front and back. Please make sure to answer all the questions. You do not need to give your name and contact info, but we do need everything else. For all the questions, please make sure to circle only one response. For Q3, circle response “E” if not growing up in a church and only attending other church(es) best describes your previous church involvement. The survey is designed to read the question and then give the first answer that comes to your mind. On page 2 you will see there is an option “C” for “Neither/No Opinion”. Use this answer when necessary, but try to use it sparingly. Any questions?

**APPENDIX D****Second Letter to Participate**

date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Almost two years ago I contacted you regarding a dissertation I'm working on. The goal of the project is to discover the environment in which people with little or no church background are coming to faith. Is worship, small discipleship communities, one-on-one friendship evangelism, stranger evangelism, or service projects the most important environment for evangelism? As our culture becomes less and less Christian the question of how people are coming to faith is an unbelievably important one for the church.

Over the past 18 months I've surveyed over 300 persons in eleven churches. We've received some good data, but in order to be able to draw some good conclusions we need more data from people who are truly "never churched"—people who grew up with little or no background in a Christian community of faith but who are now followers of Christ.

When I contacted you originally, you were understandably hesitant to ask some in your never churched population who had come to faith in Christ to participate in this study. I'm very sensitive to your concerns of how a study would be perceived by them. We've tried to make this survey very non-threatening and have had a positive response from those who have taken the survey.

I wonder if you would reconsider your decision not to participate in this study? Your community of faith has done a good job reaching never churched persons, and the broader body of Christ would, I think, greatly benefit from knowing the environments that were especially conducive to evangelism for you.

I've attached the survey for you to see again. It takes from 4-10 minutes for most to complete. The method for getting the surveys to people can either be to gather a group at your church or to mail the survey to people directly and have them fill it out. Either way, I've designed it to take minimal time for you and your staff.

I will get in touch with you within the next two weeks to see if this study is something you would like to participate in. If so, great. If not, I appreciate your reconsidering this and know how much I appreciate your ministry and how much it has helped my own ministry.

Peace,  
Jack Jackson  
Att: new hope Survey

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